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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

PLAYS

With an Introduction by

PROFESSOR LOUIS A. STRAUSS

Head of the Department of English

Edited by

KENNETH THORPE ROWE

GEORGE WAHR, PUBLISHER

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INTRODUCTION

The publication of this little volume of plays seems to mark a turning-point in the development of dramatic and histrionic interests in the University of Michigan. As it arouses hopes of a dawning period of creative effort in the drama, so it compels a brief retrospect of student ideals and achievement in the past. The writer's knowledge of the history of campus dramatics, resting upon an intermittent official and semi-official contact with play-producing organizations, and upon a more sustained interest in their public activities, reaches back nearly forty years. During this time, it may be truly said, student dramatic aims have sensitively responded to the stimulus of the professional theater and of the public taste to which it catered. Years ago faculty influence sought to divert student effort from imitative emulation of the public stage. It stood, with varying degrees of conservatism, for something characteristic of the academic microcosm — such as interpretation of the classics, production of meritorious works neglected or rejected by the world outside, or, finally, production of original plays by gifted students or alumni. The students, for the most part, stubbornly opposed such advice. Probably they were right: the time had not arrived. They went on merrily producing rather worthless comedies, with little or no thought of dramaturgic

values, but with a mighty urge to display their talents upon the boards. This was largely true in the nineties and a considerable part of the first decade of the present century. But it must be said that, except for occasional lapses, there was a steady gain in the quality of the plays selected and in the taste and effectiveness of the production.

In 1890 a society known as "Thespis" was in sole possession of the dramatic field. It was a close corporation, more interested in social eligibility than in dramatic talent. It died soon, presumably of malnutrition, and was succeeded after a brief interval by the Comedy Club, our oldest existing dramatic organization. Comedy Club has had a checkered career. It has, at times, incurred some obloquy, but it has won much honor and frequently covered itself with glory. Like its predecessor it was accused of social snobbery, but that was long ago, and the club has for many years based its membership upon a test of dramatic ability, carefully and equitably conducted.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century there were few plays beside the annual performances of these two organizations. The writer has vivid recollections of an admirably acted and appointed production of Plautus's *Menaechmi,* in the original, under the direction of the Latin Department. He has hazier memories

of several minstrel shows, of which the less said the better. And finally there was a worthy attempt to produce Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar,* with a wobbly cast and a sublimely convincing mob. That is all that the closing century offered!

In the following decade things began to happen. New dramatic organizations sprouted, matured, and decayed with bewildering rapidity. Various societies organized within departments of instruction took a hand: Plays were acted in Greek, French, German, Italian, Spanish. Then came the Union Opera and the Junior Girls' Play. The Department of Speech, responding to a need in the schools of the state for teachers equipped for directing plays, developed a course in play production and supporting courses in stage-craft, setting, lighting, etc., all with a serious handicap of inadequate playhouse and equipment. In recent years Mimes has expanded its activities, originally confined to putting on the annual "opera", by producing in the second semester a series of plays of various types and degrees of excellence, with considerable success. In general, the campus has reacted strongly to the stimulus of the outer world's revival of interest in the drama; but its efforts have been almost entirely restricted to the side of interpretation.

With the exception of the Mimes Opera and the Junior Girls' Play, there has been no serious or consistent attempt at dramatic creation. Even in these long-established productions the creative vein has been tenuous and unproductive, particularly on the literary side as contrasted with the musical and histrionic. An occasional rich outcropping has usually been followed by several years of utter poverty. Those who have been actively interested in the Opera have been mystified and depressed by this weakness of the element which they naturally expected to be strongest. Does the best talent refrain from competing? Or does it deliberately write down to a standard of mediocrity which it believes to be traditionally established? These questions have been repeatedly asked, but not satisfactorily answered. Certain it is that, but for outside help in making or remaking the book, both the Opera and the Junior Play would often have gone upon the rocks. Can it be that the full-length play is too large a unit for our inexperienced young writers to handle? The recent experiment in one-act play creation would forcibly suggest an affirmative answer. On the other hand, the excellence of some half-dozen Operas and a rather larger proportion of Junior Plays tell another story.

About fifteen years ago Comedy Club offered a prize for the best play written by a student, intending to present it if worthy of production. One play was submitted! And this is the history of dramatic creation in the University up to the present time.

The plays published in this volume were submitted in a contest sponsored by the Division of English, through a committee consisting of Professors O. J. Campbell and Kenneth T. Rowe, and Valentine B. Windt, who is in charge of the work in Play Production. It was open to all University of Michigan students except graduate students engaged in instructional work. The committee wisely restricted the competition to one-act plays, reserving the larger dramatic unit for later contests. It is gratifying to record, especially in view of the foregoing sketch of the trend of dramatic efforts among our students, that thirty-one plays were submitted, many of them admirable in quality. These were carefully sifted by the committee, acting as judges, and six were selected for presentation. These included, in addition to the four plays chosen for the final presentation, *Side-show,* by Helen Elise Adler, and *Believe It or Not,* by Edward M. Heyman.

The six plays were presented on January 25. The judges, Professors James M. O'Neill, Louis I. Bredvold,

and Frederick W. Peterson, chose the following four plays to be produced in the final contest under the direction of Mr. Windt:

Outside This Room: Dorothy Lyon Ackerman

Passion's Progress: R. Leslie Askren

My Man: Jerome F. McCarthy

The Joiners: Arthur M. Hinkley

Miss Adler's *Puppet,* printed in this volume, was adjudged to be of corresponding merit, but was not produced for lack of marionette facilities.

The successful plays were given five performances in the Little Theatre of University Hall on the evenings of March 12 to 16. The Friday evening (March 15) performance was attended by an invited audience which included the three distinguished judges, all prominently identified with the country's dramatic life. They were:

Miss Jessie Bonstelle, Director of the Detroit Civic Theatre.

Mr. Daniel L. Quirk, Jr., Director of the Ypsilanti Players, and President of the Drama League.

Professor Chester M. Wallace, head of the School of Drama at Carnegie Institute of Technology.

The judges awarded first place to Arthur M. Hinkley's play, *The Joiners.* That this was no perfunc-

tory decision was shown by the careful, kindly comments upon each play given by the committee through its chairman, Professor Wallace. This action, as gracious as it was unexpected, deepens our obligation to them. It is fitting that I should make acknowledgment here of the warm appreciation of their services felt by the Division of English and the University.

It is not for me (or for anyone) to review the judges' verdict. I would point out, however, that they faced a definite problem and that they approached it impartially and judicially. Here are four (or five) plays of as many distinct types. That you or I prefer one type to the others does not warrant our declaring its exemplar the best play. That would be prejudging the plays and ruling out all but one without a hearing. So many elements press for consideration that it is very easy to entangle oneself in details and lose one's critical perspective. Plot construction, character development, dialogue, situation, wit and humor, pathos, imagination and fancy, psychological soundness, verisimilitude, and what not — all are important. But they are not equally important in all plays — no two of them have equal values in any one type of play, and in many plays some have no value whatever. It is a cardinal principle of art criticism that a work must be judged in terms of what it purports to be: not in terms of what the critic

might wish it to be. Here was a contest of young playwrights striving to show their mastery of the technique of dramatic expression. Each had an idea and expressed it. We always have with us the question as to the relative merits of a good idea indifferently expressed and an indifferent idea well expressed. This is sheer futility: in either case the result is bad. Granting the germ of a worthwhile idea in all the plays (and I believe that everyone who saw them performed will grant it), the question for the judges was which author developed his idea most effectively and dramatically. The plays were acted before them and were judged in the light of a wide and mature experience that would be hard to match. There was no counting of points of excellence in this and that detail of technique; no pursuit of the *ignis fatuis* of "general merit". The plays were judged on the solid ground of dramatic effectiveness — the ground upon which the competition was based.

It would add greatly to the value of this volume if the judges' comments could be included in the Introduction. But unfortunately we have no record of them, as the printing of the plays was not foreseen. A few remarks of my own, from which I would gladly refrain if it were permitted, must suffice. My earnest hope is

that they may be thought to emit some faint echoes of Professor Wallace's words.

Outside This Room, by Dorothy Lyon Ackerman, is distinctly an atmosphere play. It has abundant charm and reveals considerable power of imagination. The characters are strongly delineated, and the psychology leans decidedly to the abnormal, the insanity and morbidity of the elder persons dominating the home and communicating themselves to the imprisoned children. Despite its gloomy tone, the work is distinctly pleasing, and its sincerity is manifest. There is a fine undercurrent of pathetic irony in this play. It reads rather better than it plays, which suggests a possible weakness in the construction: there is a rigid economy and compactness in the dialogue which enhances the difficulty of presentation. Under ideal stage conditions this would probably constitute a merit rather than a fault.

In R. Leslie Askren's play, *Passion's Progress,* we have a conventional triangle designed to serve as a vehicle for clever dialogue. There is little or no plot and the characters are indistinct, neither of which is a serious fault in what verges on Comedy of Manners. But a compensating brilliancy of dialogue is the *sine qua non* of a society satire of this sort. The author has done extremely well in this direction: but the task, as

the judges pointed out, is one that brings the severest test to mature dramatists. The lines give evidence of careful workmanship: but at times they are flat and at times over subtle, and fail to reach the audience. There are frequent flashes of genuine wit: there are also labored passages which suggest the art that does not conceal art. The total impression produced by the play is one of great promise in the author.

My Man, by Jerome F. McCarthy, is an intensely realistic study of an age-old theme, the love of a woman for a worthless brute of a man. The hard drabness of the life of the underworld is depicted with telling repulsiveness: no glint of romantic picturesqueness is permitted to relieve the monotone. The action, somewhat slow in gathering headway, moves swiftly and surely to the crisis, rising to a moment of poignant pathos before the curtain. The story is handled with the simplicity the action calls for: the author's touch is sure and the treatment carries conviction. A little idealization of the heroine might have won approval and brought the work nearer to the standardized drama of this type: but it would have been a false note which we are glad to miss.

The winning play, *The Joiners,* by Arthur M. Hinkley, was well adapted to top off an admirable program of one-act plays. Satirical comedy of the

lightest sort, simply and straightforwardly developed, timely and popular in theme, its humour was an open book to the audience and scored at every turn. It had no subtlety — but who looks for subtlety in the Main Street of fraternal, animal, and service organizations? When the curtain descended upon the two arch-joiners, hands locked in their supernal grip, voices chanting in unison the tremendous oath of fealty to the unborn order of priesthood, the house rocked with merriment. Here was a subject perfectly adapted to the form employed and developed with satisfying effectiveness.

Whether the unacted play, *Puppet,* by Helen E. Adler, could be successfully staged, I do not pretend to know. Certainly it would demand masterly direction and infinite care in the working out of details. The acting, both of the human characters and of the puppets would have to be of the highest order: even so, a miracle of production would be required to render the fantasy effective. As a closet play, *Puppet* is delightful. The allegory is stimulating and poetic, and the ingenious conceit of the refractory puppet and of Pinocchio's mischievous influence furnishes a charming motivation. Back of it all is a pregnant philosophy, nebulous, to be sure, but not too nebulous for a puppet play. And there is a pertinent and pleasing use of snatches of

poetry, with sufficient, but not excessive, iteration to ensure its effectiveness.

In closing I may be permitted to say a few words in appreciation of the work of many who contributed to the success of this undertaking. High commendation is due to the members of the Play Production class — those who assisted the director in the varied and difficult tasks of staging the plays. It is their devotion to the cause that made the successful outcome possible.

To Messrs. Rowe and Windt, newcomers on the campus this year, belongs the chief credit for this happy venture. The idea was born, nursed, and developed in their class-rooms and workshop. The fine spirit of cooperation that brought their interests together was bound to bring results. The opportunity for students of dramatic composition to see their plays produced and in the process of production is of paramount importance; it vitalizes their efforts and stimulates intelligent revision with a view to the requirements of the stage. Obviously the experience is equally valuable to the players. To furnish such opportunity was fundamental in the cooperative plan of the two directors. Anyone who attended the performance of the plays can attest to the admirable work of Mr. Windt. He discovered quantities of unsuspected talent and made the most of it. The plays were surprisingly well cast and acted,

and more surprisingly well staged at a trifling expense and in spite of the most discouraging handicaps. Only unusual abilty and extraordinary patience and determination could achieve such results. It is less easy, however, for the average outsider to appreciate Mr. Rowe's part in the project. The testimony of his students tells a story of inspiring enthusiasm and sympathetic helpfulness that have accomplished much in an incredibly short time. As the acted plays show what Mr. Windt has effected on the side of interpretation, so the printed plays reveal in Mr. Rowe's work a new stimulus to dramatic creation that has long been needed on the campus.

And the printed plays suggest Mr. George Wahr, publisher, public-spirited citizen of Ann Arbor, friend of the University. His generosity in printing these plays and giving to our young authors the reward they most desire is not new to us: we have long admired his attitude of sympathy with the students in their higher interests. We are grateful to him for this new favor; and we believe that both he and the University are to be congratulated upon the appearance of this little book of plays, the first, we hope, of a long series.

LOUIS A. STRAUSS.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Professor Louis A. Strauss in the Introduction has made fitting and graceful acknowledgement of the services of those who have had a principal part in making the creation and presentation of these plays possible: of Professor Oscar J. Campbell, who with his customary enthusiasm towards creative activities on the campus, acted as chairman of the Division of English committee sponsoring the competition in dramatic writing; of the judges who selected the plays for final production and publication, Professors James M. O'Neill, Louis I. Bredvold, and Frederick W. Peterson; of the judges who selected the play for the final award of first place, Miss Jessie Bonstelle, Mr. Daniel L. Quirk, Jr., and Professor Chester M. Wallace; of Mr. Valentine B. Windt and his students of Play Production, who staged the plays; and of Mr. George Wahr, to whose generosity the publication of these plays is due.

To the editor falls the pleasure of expressing appreciation for the favor Professor Strauss has conferred in writing the Introduction to these plays. The volume would have been peculiarly incomplete without this contribution from his intimate knowledge of dramatic endeavor at the University of Michigan, his scholarship, and critical insight. The students must

feel that the warm interest Professor Strauss has manifested is one of the final rewards of their efforts.

The editor would also like to express recognition of the distinction added to the volume by the drawings of Lee E. Blaser, '32, for the stage design illustrating Helen E. Adler's play "Puppet," and the design which appears on the cover of this book; and to thank Miss Helen Watier and R. Leslie Askren for invaluable assistance in editing. Finally, some tribute should be paid to the spirit of all the students who have been writing plays. A few plays are receiving public recognition; but these plays have come into being in a stimulating atmosphere of mutual criticism and unity of spirit. The book is the achievement of all the students in the University of Michigan who have devoted themselves to dramatic writing.

K. R.

Ann Arbor, Michigan
April 22, 1929

Presented by

Play Production, University of Michigan

University Hall Theatre

March 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16

1929

TECHNICAL STAFF

DIRECTOR ..... *Valentine B. Windt*

ASS'T DIRECTORS ..... *Dee Thompson*, *Joe Bates Smith*

ART DIRECTOR ..... *Charles Holden*

COSTUMES ..... *Edna L. Johnson*

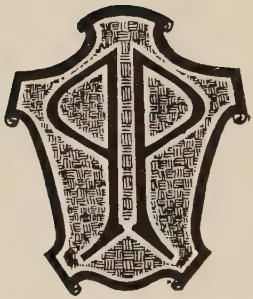
PROPERTIES ..... *Anna Monroe*, *Hobert Skidmore*

STAGE MANAGER ..... *Alfred Golden*

ELECTRICIAN ..... *Randolph Berry*

CREDO

Play Production wishes to dedicate itself as a laboratory workshop for all students of the University of Michigan seriously interested in any or all of the Theatre Arts, and ultimately to serve the community at large by mounting plays of merit with distinction.



THE PLAYS

(in program order)

1. OUTSIDE THIS ROOM.....Dorothy Lyon Ackerman

27. PASSION'S PROGRESS.....R. Leslie Askren

83. MY MAN.....Jerome F. McCarthy

119. THE JOINERS, *Awarded First Place*.....
.....Arthur M. Hinkley

139. *PUPPET.....Helen Elise Adler

**Selected for publication, but not produced for lack of a marionette theatre.*

MADAME BLACKMANN. Oh, Steineslaus, why must you be so forgetful?

OUTSIDE THIS ROOM

by DOROTHY LYON ACKERMAN, *'29*

CAST

MADAME BLACKMANN	*Edna Mower*
ANNA	*Frances Menges*
STEINESLAUS BLACKMANN	*S. Truesdale Mayers*
HELENE	*Mildred Todd*
RUTH	*Mary Louise Brown*
BETTY	*Leone Lee*

THE *curtain rises on the living room of* MADAME BLACKMANN'S *second floor apartment in Zurich, Switzerland. The woodwork, walls, and rug are dark brown and dingy; the whole effect is gloomy.*

A door at the left leads to the kitchen A door at back left opens into a tiny hall through which may be seen the entrance door of the apartment, which opens onto the stairway. At right is a door which opens into MADAME BLACKMANN'S *little used parlour. At center back is a large window from which may be seen Lake Zurich, and Mount Rigi, Mount Speer, and Mount Glaraus in the distance.*

To the right center is a round table. It has an elaborately worked center piece on it, a few books, and

MADAME BLACKMANN'S *work basket. At the back left, in a corner but several feet from the wall, is a tile stove with a little coal box beside it. There is an old-fashioned sofa to the left front partly facing the audience and several chairs are grouped around the table. With the exception of two very old family portraits on the wall there are few ornaments in the room.*

When the play opens it is mid-afternoon of a February day. As the play progresses it grows more dark and the atmosphere becomes more gloomy. A light in the parlour must be arranged so that when turned on its rays fall into the shadowy living room.

As the curtain rises MADAME BLACKMANN, *a tall, massive woman dressed in black, is standing looking out of the window. She is about forty-seven and wears her dark hair pulled tightly back from her dark-skinned face. Her presence in a room is depressing. After the curtain* ANNA, *her companion-maid, a plump country girl with brown braids wrapped around her head, enters from the kitchen with an armful of house slippers. She crosses the room and dumps them on the sofa.*

MADAME BLACKMANN. Anna, the lake is gray and sad today. Mount Rigi looms up very faintly.

ANNA. (*Seated in the chair and rocking vigorously as she embroiders*) Yes, Madame, it's a bad sign when Rigi fades.

MADAME BLACKMANN. I had forgotten that part, Anna. But it isn't true. You cling too closely to the beliefs of your village.

ANNA. Your village and your beliefs once too, Madame.

MADAME BLACKMANN. My village and my people still, Anna. But education does do strange things to one. Now Rigi's fading is merely a matter of weather, or rather, a matter of great and intense beauty. I never see it, Anna, without having the dreams of my youth return to me, especially the dream of singing gloriously as Rigi is glorious. Well — is it cold out, Anna?

ANNA. The wind is bitter, Madame, and the goat-boy did not come this morning. He would rather keep his old goat warm than keep his customers.

MADAME BLACKMANN. (*Laughing*) Don't blame him too harshly, Anna.

ANNA. The silly fool!

MADAME BLACKMANN. (*Warming her hands at the stove*) The girls will be home soon, won't they? You'd better put their slippers on the stove to warm. (*She returns to the window and looks out anxiously as* ANNA *gets up and puts the slippers on the stove*) And Steineslaus will be coming too, I hope.

ANNA. Perhaps he will. The wind is so bitter and Rigi fades. It's a very bad sign, fading.

MADAME BLACKMANN. (*Turning suddenly and facing* ANNA) Anna, Anna, look at me! Isn't it true that the girls are beginning to hate me?

ANNA. (*Startled*) Why Madame! No — no, of course not. Why should they? Haven't you taken care of them for years when their families didn't want to be bothered? You've taught them, and nursed them, and — and a lot of things.

MADAME BLACKMANN. No, Anna. I feel it. I know it. They distrust me and they are beginning to hate me.

ANNA. (*With hesitancy*) Perhaps — perhaps, Madame, if you let them get out a little more, go places, see more of the world —

MADAME BLACKMANN. (*Interrupting*) World!

that's just what I've been trying to keep out of them — the desire for the world. Oh, why do they have to grow up? Once they do I shall lose them and with them the only means I have of providing for Steineslaus. There — there's Steineslaus now, coming down the near path. Poor man, how much older he gets each day, and so stooped too.

ANNA. Yes, his beard grays.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Anna, see he never takes his eyes from the lake. Old — such a very old man — and how childish he is at times. Before the war, Anna, you would not have known him. Oh, he was strong and cheerful then. And now — without my help, the very bread I earn —I fear, Anna, I do fear. Pray God I shall always be able to care for him.

ANNA. (*Abruptly*) Yes, pray God.

MADAME BLACKMANN. There, he has turned in the walk. You may start tea now, Anna.

ANNA *goes into the kitchen.* MADAME BLACKMANN *opens the door and talks to her husband as he comes up the stairs. The loving tone she uses with him is entirely different from the one she uses with the rest of the world.*

Steineslaus, my darling, you are half frozen, I know. Don't hurry so on the stairs. I can wait one minute longer to see you.

STEINESLAUS BLACKMANN *enters. He is a stooped man of about fifty who appears to be much older. His bushy hair and beard are quite gray.*

STEINESLAUS. (*Breathing hard*) There — there — those stairs are bad.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Here, let me help you with your coat, darling. You shouldn't hurry so. There, sit by the stove and I'll take your boots off. (*She takes off his boots and puts on his slippers*) Did you have a nice walk? Where have you been all day, my love? I'm afraid you go too far. The day's so cold too.

STEINESLAUS. I don't mind the cold, Jean. You know that. In dear Lutz the wind was far more fierce.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Yes, my dear, but you were a boy then and much stronger than you are now.

STEINESLAUS. (*Rocks back and forth in his chair and begins to talk to himself*) I am strong. I am strong. Who dares say I am not strong? I must

give my strength to Poland. My poor unfortunate Poland. She must be freed. She must be freed from Russia. (*He becomes very excited*) Bah! They cannot make us speak Russian. The swine! My God! We'll say anything we like. (*He starts to rise from his chair and* MADAME BLACKMANN *calms him*)

MADAME BLACKMANN. Oh my dear, my poor dear Steineslaus. Can't you understand? You must understand. Poland is free, was freed many years ago. Come now. Tell me of your walk. Did you meet the little blond boy?

STEINESLAUS. (*Brightening at once*) Yes — yes — young yellow top. We talked of spring. In the spring we are going to fly a kite. We flew kites in Lutz. (*His face begins to darken and his wife interrupts hastily*)

MADAME BLACKMANN. Yes, in the spring?

STEINESLAUS. Oh, yes, in the spring, when the lake and sky are blue, a beautiful blue. Look, Jean, see if the lake is getting bluer.

MADAME BLACKMANN *goes to the window and with her back to her husband stares out with an expression of fear.*

MADAME BLACKMANN. Yes, Steineslaus, it is getting bluer. Blue? Blue? If it only were — and Rigi fades.

STEINESLAUS. What? What did you say?

MADAME BLACKMANN. I was talking about the blue, dear, and the lake.

STEINESLAUS. (*Looking at her with a blank expression*) Blue? Blue?

MADAME BLACKMANN. (*Sighs and changes the subject*) Never mind, Steineslaus. In the spring I will be able to buy you any kite your heart desires. The allowance for keeping Ruth came from her father today. Ten years now since she was sent to me. He never writes to her anymore. And Hélène's brother seems to have forgotten too, though he's always prompt with his check.

STEINESLAUS. Checks — dirty Americans, upsetting the whole world with their dollars. Dogs!

MADAME BLACKMANN. Hush, my dear! God will punish us if you talk like that. How else could we live? And it's not for the money alone. No one cares for them but us. I've seen to their education properly, haven't I?

TEINESLAUS. (*Whimpering*) You are fond-
r of them than you are of me.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Hush, my darling.
Of course I love only you. They will go soon enough.
In spite of my warning, I'm afraid Betty is teaching
hem to wonder about things. She is so very American.
Yesterday I caught her teaching Hélène some silly
American song.

TEINESLAUS. Always in the way.

MADAME BLACKMANN. I'm sorry, I would
never have taken her if the rent had not been placed up
gain. And then she was so pale and thin. She is im-
proving a little. If only she weren't quite so American!

TEINESLAUS. Dogs!

MADAME BLACKMANN. (*Shaking her head*)
My poor dear. My Steineslaus.

Noise and laughter is heard on the stairs. The girls
nter, but immediately before entering the door they
ease all laughter and come in with solemn faces.
IELENE *is twenty and beautiful, with dark hanging*
raids. RUTH *is eighteen, rather homely; her thin,*
ull brown braids are wrapped around her head.
ETTY, *sixteen, is the typical, bobbed American of*

that age except that she is very pale and thin. She is well dressed. HELENE *and* RUTH *wear dark, ill-fitting clothes that are almost old-fashioned. As they are pulling off their wraps and putting aprons on over their dresses they greet* MADAME BLACKMANN, HELENE *and* RUTH *calling her* AUNT JEAN.

MADAME BLACKMANN'S *voice is hard and stern as she speaks to them.*

MADAMEBLACKMANN. How do you do, children? Are you very cold?

HELENE. Yes, quite cold, Aunt Jean.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Anna, Anna, come and help the girls with their boots.

ANNA *comes at once. The girls greet her. They sit down on the sofa and she helps them take off their boots and put on the slippers.*

HELENE. Umm — that feels good.

BETTY. Nice and warm.

RUTH. (*Teasingly*) Anna, how's the goat-boy?

ANNA. He didn't come today.

BETTY. Ohoo — perhaps he's taken a new route and won't come to see you again.

ANNA. Perhaps.

HELENE. "The Sun never changes his course." You taught me the proverb yourself, Anna. What do you say about it?

MADAME BLACKMANN. Enough of silliness. Anna, bring the tea. Betty, did the walk tire you as much as usual?

ANNA *exits to the kitchen.*

BETTY. Yes, Madame Blackmann, I must admit it did.

RUTH. She had to stop twice for rest on the way home.

BETTY. Hush! It's only because Ruth and Hélène walk so fast.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Yes, healthy animals, they've walked that path to school so many, many times. But here's the tea.

ANNA *enters with the tray.* MADAME BLACKMANN *pours tea.*

This for Betty, Anna, and this for Steineslaus.

BETTY. Nothing for me, thank you.

MADAME BLACKMANN. No tea? Silly child, it will make you feel better.

BETTY. I'm not hungry.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Drink your tea. You were sent to me to be made strong, to strengthen that weak heart. It's been almost a year now and you are still like a ghost. Take the cup.

BETTY. Oh, all right.

ANNA. Good child.

BETTY. It's just funny to have tea. At home we never do. But in America girls do what they want to do.

STEINESLAUS. I never get to do what I want to do. I want to fly a kite.

MADAME BLACKMANN. (*Laughing*) Oh, you poor things! (*Suddenly becoming serious*) Has

my life been doing what I want to do? Have I sung as I wanted to? No! I—

STEINESLAUS. You married beneath you, a poor, weakling clerk. (*He rocks back and forth and begins to cry*)

MADAME BLACKMANN. (*Going over to him*) Oh my dear, forgive me. You are all I have ever wanted. Come, smile at me. Finish your tea and then you can take your nap. (*She turns to the girls and speaks in a low voice*) Because it still seems impossible to me, I forget at times that he is not well. He must be improving. Don't you think so?

RUTH. Perhaps he is.

STEINESLAUS. You are talking about me. I know you are. I don't like it.

MADAME BLACKMANN. We were just wondering if you had forgotten the peppermints, Steineslaus.

STEINESLAUS. (*Chuckling*) Oh, I am not so stupid, Jean. Look in my coat pocket.

MADAME BLACKMANN *goes to the hall rack and begins to bo through his pockets. She draws out*

a letter.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Steineslaus! This letter — It's from Buren. How long have you had it?

STEINESLAUS. Umm — look in the inside pocket, Jean.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Oh, Steineslaus, why must you be so forgetful?

STEINESLAUS. Can't you find them?

MADAME BLACKMANN. (*Sighs as she draws out a small package*) Yes, here they are.

RUTH *comes and gets the mints and passes them around.* MADAME BLACKMANN *puts the letter casually in her apron pocket.*

MADAME BLACKMANN. My dear, it is nice of you to bring us presents. But come now and take your nap before supper. I'll close the blinds and cover you up. (*She helps him out of his chair. As they are about to leave the room through the kitchen door she turns and speaks*) Betty, your needlepoint is in my workbasket. I had to take out some of the stitches. Be more careful in the future.

MADAME BLACKMANN *and her husband exit.*

BETTY. (*Going to the table and taking her work out of the basket*) Ugh! Needlepoint forever and always.

HELENE. (*Taking her own work from the window sill*) What if you'd had ten years of it? Ten years of the same house, the same path to school, and the same path back again. Always and eternally the same. Nothing, nothing of the outside world.

RUTH. Be sensible. There's only one path to Madame Graf's. Unless, of course, you want to try wading the lake.

HELENE. Stupid, you'll die here. You and that crazy Steineslaus and his stone-faced wife.

RUTH. Hush! Take care.

BETTY. Oh, don't quarrel. I'm too tired to listen. Be still and I'll finish that movie I was telling. That should cheer you, Hélène. Let's see, where was I?

ANNA. (*Who has been completely absorbed with her embroidery up to the mention of the movie*) She was dressing.

BETTY. Dressing? Oh yes, in a shiny thing, made of crystals, long and tight and low at the throat, like this. And while she put perfume on her hair and a touch on her beautiful eyebrows, the maid came in and announced Paul's arrival.

HELENE. Is he handsome?

BETTY. Oh, you should see him, so tall and dark, and such a smile. Every woman in America is mad about him. Where was I? Oh, she goes to meet him, like this. (*She gets up and gives an awkward imitation of the actress's walk*)

HELENE. Let me try. (*She walks across the stage with a gliding, graceful step*) Is that it?

BETTY. Perfectly! Do it again.

ANNA. Like a princess.

BETTY. Well, Paul came up —

HELENE. (*Interrupting*) Oh, to have a crystal dress!

RUTH. Do let her finish. Aunt Jean will be coming.

HELENE. Oh, to see real plays, beautiful operas, and a movie, a real movie, just once! To hear funny,

wicked songs. No more dull concerts at the Tonhalle. All in a crystal gown!

RUTH. You were thrilled enough when you got to head Rudolph von Schall last year.

ANNA. Every other week it was, "Please let's go to the Tonhalle."

HELENE. That stupid fat tenor!

BETTY. Do you want me to finish this or not?

RUTH. Do, please, Betty. Here, I'll take your needlepoint, and you act it out.

BETTY. Oh, I'm too tired to act. Where was I again?

ANNA. Paul came up — and —

At this point MADAME BLACKMANN *enters. The girls pretend to be very hard at work. She is too agitated, however, to be suspicious. She carries the letter in her hand.*

MADAME BLACKMANN. Something dreadful has happened. Dreadful. Aunt Margot's husband has died. Poor old Henri!

HELENE. Poor man.

RUTH. Such a nice old man too.

ANNA. You see, Rigi fading is a bad sign.

MADAME BLACKMANN *passes quickly over the old man's death to get to the point nearest her.*

MADAME BLACKMANN. Yes, yes, it's very sad, but that leaves Aunt Margot no one to depend on, to live with, but me. Oh, what shall I do? There's not room for another person here. And this is the cheapest apartment we can have and still be decent. What on earth shall I do? How can I ever make ends meet? It's been hard enough. It means — it means one of you must go!

ANNA. (*Eagerly*). Madame, I'll go. Spring will come; there will be work in the fields, and sunshine.

MADAME BLACKMANN. No, no, Anna. I can't do without you. She's an old lady. I will need more help than ever. And Betty, you can't go. With your heart you need this country. And your German is just getting to be passable. No, you must stay. Your people would want it so. (*She turns to* RUTH *and* HELENE)

HELENE. It must be either Ruth or I.

MADAME BLACKMANN. I hate to think so. How I shall miss you! And where will you go? Mere children!

HELENE. Into the world outside.

MADAME BLACKMANN. And little you know of it. (*She looks around at the kitchen door anxiously*) By all means don't tell Steineslaus of this. Not yet. We still have several days. I must advertise for piano pupils again. Perhaps something can be arranged. Oh, what shall I do? And which one is to go?

RUTH. There, don't excite yourself so. Let Hélène and me talk this over calmly. Go lie down and rest. Anna, you should be starting supper.

BETTY. I'd better practice. I've felt too tired and queer to work at all today.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Half an hour will be enough, Betty. Then you may lie down.

ANNA *goes into the kitchen carrying the tea tray. She is rather indignant at being dismissed.* BETTY *goes into the parlour and turns on a light by the piano. A streak of it falls through the door into the outer room,*

which is in the dusk by now. She begins to play softly.

MADAME BLACKMANN. I've feared this. I've dreaded it all along. It isn't your checks, though the lord only knows how I'll manage now. It's that I love you both as if you were my own. And which one of you to send away? That is beyond me.

She leaves the room through the kitchen door.

HELENE. (*Closing the door after* MADAME BLACKMANN) Huh! Not the checks! Did you see how quickly she forgot the old man's death? It's been her fear for years that one of us might be sent for. Not that that's likely — a brother like mine — and you with your divorced parents — not likely, but all the same she's been careful to keep the desire for the world out of us.

RUTH. And if it weren't for Betty, she would have been successful in it.

HELENE. Yes, she made a mistake there — for more money.

RUTH. Not for money entirely. She is helping her. And with that crazy Steineslaus — well, he get's worse

every day and she needs all the money she can get.

HELENE. If he's crazy it's because of her and not because of the war.

RUTH. Hélène! You say that! He's the one thing she loves.

HELENE. Yes, I do. Hasn't she driven us nearly mad, keeping us shut up in this house day after day, sending us to that prison-like school where knowledge is kept from us, not given to us, keeping those shiny eyes on us continually. Nearly mad, I tell you.

RUTH. How do you know what's mad and what's sane? The rest of the world may be like this for all you know.

HELENE. That's the pity. We don't know. We can't see outside of this room.

The music from the other room has become restless. HELENE *paces up and down with the same restless rhythm.*

RUTH. Yes, cooped up with a half mad Pole and that Satan woman.

HELENE. You too? That's your first word against her.

RUTH. (*Rising angrily*) Do you think I'm not human, not alive? I've detested her for years. From the beginning she's despised me, made fun of me, my emotions, my thoughts. She's been partial to you in everything just because she, like the rest of the world, is attracted to the lovely. Did she ever punish you, you pretty thing?

HELENE. Ruth! You're unjust!

Their voices have risen unconsciously to talk above the music. They now shout at each other across the table.

RUTH. Oh, no I'm not. You never did recognize the truth. You and your grand restlessness. You and your desire for escape. You act. You pose. You don't know what real desire is. You — don't — know.

HELENE. And you — just a bundle of flesh, with your squint eyes and your drab hair, you dare to tell me what I feel, what I want?

RUTH. Yes this bundle of flesh with the dingy hair dares to tell the beautiful Hélène just how empty-souled she is. And I dare to tell you that *I'm* the one who's going into the world outside.

HELENE. *You!* How very amusing! And how do you intend to startle the world?

RUTH. That's where we differ — I don't intend to.

HELENE. (*Violently angry and shouting*) You idiot — you pig. I'm going. Do you hear? I'm going. Hear that, you fool, hear that!

RUTH. Yes, I hear it — but I'm going. You know I'm going.

HELENE *raises both fists. She is speechless with anger and in the pause that falls, the music, which has been coming to a crashing climax, suddenly stops in the middle of a measure. An instant later a dull thud is heard.* RUTH *with a cry of "*BETTY*" rushes into the parlour.* HELENE *comes out of her dazed anger and follows her. We cannot see them but their voices are heard from the other room.*

HELENE. (*Frantically*) Betty — Betty, Betty.

RUTH. She's dead!

HELENE. Oh, no, no. (*Calls loudly*) Aunt Jean! Aunt Jean!

RUTH. Rub her hands.

HELENE. I'll hold her like this.

MADAME BLACKMANN *comes running through*

the outer room, which is quite dark by now, and enters the lighted parlour. STEINESLAUS *and* ANNA *follow her. There is much confused talking. The girls are sobbing. Out of the confusion we hear sentences like these*:

MADAME BLACKMANN. Anna, go next door and phone for the doctor, quickly.

ANNA. (*Mutters to herself as she passes through the room and out the entrance door*) Rigi — fading. It's a very bad sign. Terrible.

MADAME BLACKMANN. Oh, my dear Betty, my poor child . . . . . Steineslaus, go after Anna. Tell her to get the doctor from across the street, much quicker.

STEINESLAUS. (*Enters the room muttering*) Free — free to fly on a kite in the blue sky. (*Goes to the window and looks out*) Dirty American! We could all be free in the deep lake and the blue sky.

He hums a tune as he goes out the hall door.

There is a short silence broken by the sound of weeping. Then HELENE *comes onto the stage and walks to the window. She is followed by* RUTH *who sits in a chair and cries softly. There is a pause.*

HELENE. (*Turning suddenly to* RUTH) Do you know what this means? Think!

RUTH. (*Looks startled and stops crying immediately*) Why we shall both have to stay! We shall! No escape. No outside world. Horrible! Oh, why did she have to die?

HELENE. (*Laughs hysterically and points her finger at* RUTH) Did you say *I* was empty-souled?

Curtain

MYRNA. . . . the door of "the very fine cage" is left open —

PASSION'S PROGRESS

A Satirical Title for a Tea-Time Play

by R. Leslie Askren, *'29*

CAST

CATO	*James Griess*
VERNON DOUGLAS	*Robert Adams*
MYRNA STREETER	*Shirley King*
JOHN LANGDON	*Charles Peake*

THE *scene opens in the living room of* JOHN LANGDON'S *apartment, the sort of a place where a man can be a gentleman without having to insist upon it. There are several important features of the room. At lower right is a door to* VERNON DOUGLAS' *room; lower left is the door to the master's bed chamber. Upstage center, or anywhere else within easy walking distance, is a buffet for drinks. There is also a telephone on it. The time is nearly late afternoon; it becomes evening before the play is over.* VERNON DOUGLAS, *the first character who appears, is not quite dressed but he wears clothes so well that it would be a pleasure to meet him in underwear, particularly since his personality suggests that possibility constantly, which is a tribute more to his manners and grace than to his morals. He carries*

a healthy sized "vade mecum", otherwise a highball, and as the curtain goes up, emerges to answer the ringing telephone, first taking a long drink, and then addressing Japanese butler CATO *to this effect:*

I'll take it, Cato.

(*To the telephone*) Yes?

Oh, Good morning!

Forgive me, good afternoon.

What party? You mean last night?

How do you know?

I! You, with me? Good God!

Why you know perfectly well you're the last woman on earth I'd ask to one of my parties!

That's not "horrid", it's just safety first.

Was I? Then I was drunk. But then, I'm always sweet when I'm drunk.

There follows considerable conversation from the other end which the audience can almost hear from the bored expression on the classic Douglas visage. To which, finally —

I said I was drunk!

No!!

No!!!!

Dear child, I don't even know what "honeybunches" are!

Well, all right, I did say it. Have it your own way.

How do I feel? What makes you ask that?

Well, it's none of your business how I feel — and besides, I haven't been up long enough to find out.

Ah — ah — I'm sorry. I'm afraid I'm not quite well enough for that.

You know I hate Bertie. He's so sloppy.

All right, I'll come. But you're so tiresome.

But I must dress, "Honeybunch." (*From which you infer that she is anything but that*)

Well, I'll hurry. Goodby.

(*To* CATO) If any more ladies call for me, I'm out, see!

CATO. Yes sir.

DOUG. Everything in shape for John, Cato?

CATO. Yes sir.

DOUG. We don't want too much evidence lying around.

CATO. Yes sir.

Again the telephone rings, this time CATO *answering.*

CATO. Hallo. Mr. Langdon Apartment.

No Miss. Mr. Langdon not come back yet.

No Miss. Mr. Douglas is —

DOUGLAS *nevertheless has been listening to the conversation. Eagerly he signals.*

Wait! Who is it?

CATO. Excuse please, Miss, one moment. (*Palms the transmitter*)

DOUG. Who is it? Miss Streeter?

CATO. I think so, You speak?

DOUG. Yes, give it to me.

Hello, Myrna Streeter?

This is Vern Douglas.

Fine, but I'm slipping.

Oh, the allusion's too vague, but the general meaning is that I've had a drink, then I'm going to have another, and then I'm going to mix myself the father of all Tom Collinses and go out and meet my woman.

Well, I have to be sweet. So I'm getting drunk so I can be sweet, see?

Oh, all right.

No, John hasn't come back yet. But then, his train isn't due until five forty-three.

Oh, that's tragic!

Well, why don't you come up here and wait?

Trust me — but then I thought you'd want me to say that.

Yes quite, but let me warn you — I shall be my naked self.

Oh, I don't mean boring. I never bore people. But I am dressing!

Well, if you feel you can trust yourself.

All right. Au 'voir .

That requires another drink, which empties his glass. Refilling it from the whiskey bottle and the syphon, the whiskey bottle empties.

DOUG. Cato, more whiskey.

CATO. (*Coming in from the kitchen*) Yes sir.

DOUG. Oh, and Cato —

CATO. Yes sir.

DOUG. Miss Streeter is coming a little early so you'd better —

CATO. For tea sir —(*with quite pardonable zeal*)

DOUG. No, wait. She can drink tea later with John. It'll be much more polite. (*As if by being polite* JOHN *were not being quite the virile man he might be*) Mix some cocktails instead.

CATO. Yes sir.

DOUGLAS *retires to the right to complete dressing. He speaks from off stage to* CATO *who is fussing at the buffet with the drink things.*

DOUG. I guess we'll settle down to sober respectability now, Cato, what?

CATO. Maybe so sir.

DOUG. No more late parties.

CATO. Yes sir.

DOUG. "Yes", or No! Cato?

CATO. No sir.

DOUG. Pretty hard on you to have to entertain blondes all night, and work all morning.

CATO. I don't get much sleep sir.

DOUG. Do you find you need sleep?

CATO. Yes sir.

DOUG. That's a bad habit.

CATO. Yes sir.

DOUG. You're getting old, Cato.

CATO. Yes sir.

DOUG. Don't say "yes sir" all the time. Say "Hell yes" or something.

CATO. Yes sir.

DOUG. Cato!!

CATO. Hell yes, sir!

DOUG. Now be careful. You musn't shock Miss Streeter when she comes with all your swearing.

CATO. Hell no, sir.

DOUG. Say, Cato! How much whiskey have we drunk since John left?

CATO. Three case, sir. This begin new case. (*This is demonstrated by pointing to the new bottle on the buffet*)

DOUG. My god! And we didn't have any large parties either. Just two or three couples.

CATO. Las' night was eight sir.

DOUG. Oh yes, but we didn't drink much. (*Which makes* DOUGLAS *recall something amusing. He can be heard laughing*)

Oh Cato, Cato, what a hit you made with that dizzy blonde last night! Do you like blondes, Cato?

CATO. Make no difference sir.

DOUG. Now be a gentleman, Cato.

CATO. Yes sir.

DOUG. Oh, you like all of them, eh?

CATO. Hell no, sir.

DOUG. Well, she liked you well enough. Said she was an actress who'd never missed a cue till she met you.

CATO. What is that sir?

DOUG. A cue? Oh, you wouldn't understand. She meant she liked your face.

CATO. Thank you, sir.

DOUG. Prig!

But the apartment buzzer rings to check the Oriental retort.

That will be Myrna. Tell her I'll be right out, Cato.

CATO. Yes sir.

He opens the door for MYRNA STREETER *who enters familiarly, dressed very much a la mode for a brilliantly sunshining afternoon and giving the impression of a very personable young lady.*

MYRN. Hello, Cato. Mr. Langdon isn't home yet, is he?

CATO. No, Miss. Mr. Douglas say he be right out.

MYRN. Thank you.

DOUGLAS' *entry breaks off further confidences.*

DOUG. Ah, hello Myrn.

MYRN. How are you, Vern. Why, you're all dressed!

DOUG. Certainly. I couldn't receive the fiancee of the well known John Langdon, financier and art connoisseur, in undress, could I?

MYRN. From what you said on the telephone I was prepared for almost anything.

DOUG. I'm sorry to disappoint you. It might still be arranged, however.

MYRN. No thanks. Never mind.

DOUG. Well, if you protest.

MYRN. You know, Vern, I think you'd look awfully well with your shirt open at the throat.

DOUG. My dear child! Perhaps you'd like a "pure white lily in my mediaeval hand," too. No, no, it can't be done. We men have a price to pay for our masculinity — and by God we'll pay it!

Of course, they have made themselves comfortable by now.

MYRN. I think you're quite masculine enough as it is.

DOUG. Ah, do I thrill you with my manly strength?

MYRN. Well, not quite, but no one would ever mistake you.

DOUG. Thank God. Oh — I've had Cato mix cocktails for us.

Pouring them and offering MYRN *hers takes some time, but the conversation does not die.*

MYRN. That was nice.

DOUG. Yes, wasn't it?

MYRN. Well, when you have one of your plays produced you can give me a photograph of you that way.

DOUG. Yes, one of those "arty" things.

MYRN. I suppose no man's happy until he's had one taken?

DOUG. Nor happy ever after for having had it taken.

MYRN. They're so silly.

DOUG. The female trade, my dear. Women eat it up.

MYRN. No they don't, they just laugh. The big boy showing off, you know.

DOUG. Yes, I know. "Gawd, ain't I handsome, girls?" But they like it. Good Lord, the young ones! (*He mimics them in pantomime — his dramatist's sense*) They'll see it. Then they'll step back. Fix their hair. "I must be beautiful when I go to my beloved". And they'll stand there, with dreamy eyes, thinking — until their knees get weak and they know they'd better stop it.

MYRN. It isn't very nice, but you've been watching unfortunate types. Nice girls have better sense.

DOUG. Good God, don't deny the upper classes the biological urge! After all, they're entitled to a certain amount of — of — primitiveness, even as a sort of repayment for being "nice".

MYRN. Yes, but one doesn't speak of those things.

DOUG. No, nice people never speak of them; they just put the pictures in silver frames.

MYRN. I'm sure it must be a very depressing thing to be a playwright and see through people that way —

DOUG. Implying — ?

MYRN. Nothing at all.

DOUG. I don't know what you're trying to be, superior, or what?

MYRN. Not at all, just plain common sense.

DOUG. Which is the next thing to stupidity.

MYRN. It's a little difficult to know how to take you sometimes, Vern.

DOUG. You know me; you know my plays. Your job . . . . is to marry John.

MYRN. You say that as if —

DOUG. Oh no, I don't. I couldn't use you, really. I've got enough to do to take care of myself.

MYRN. But you do need somebody —

DOUG. What I really need is myself. But you don't see that. You'd have some woman seduce me into a daze of physical comfort, then I should forget everything else and be happy. That's the trouble with you. And the funny part is, you think you can see through me.

MYRN. Thats' not very flattering.

DOUG. No, it's beastly — women — nothing but eating, sleeping and — well, continually preoccupied with their selves.

MYRN. My dear, you do us wrong. You see, I can't be angry with you when it's you men who are beastly, eating and sleeping, and forever thinking their precious little thoughts that don't really matter at all.

DOUG. There you go, being physical again!

MYRN. Of course, it's the only thing. The trouble with you men is that you don't really understand how to be physical.

DOUG. None of your confounded female degeneracy, now!!

MYRN. But women do. They concentrate all life into themselves, — and that's really living!

DOUG. Life is a torment sometimes, if you think about it.

MYRN. You see, you understand.

DOUG. Of course I do, but it's not because I feel the way you do, but because I can think my way to you. I don't want to seem Christian or anything, but the flesh-pots of woman are a trifle overpowering for me.

MYRN. I'm afraid there's no hope for you, Vern.

DOUG. Hope? Maybe not.

MYRN. Women are very terrible people, I'm afraid. It's a good thing all men are not like you.

DOUG. I don't know. Maybe I'm not such a lost soul as all that. We all "want", you know. And we'll idealize what we want until we get it glorified enough so we can enjoy it.

MYRN. If you could only find someone to fall in love with, Vern.

DOUG. I'm afraid you're talking nonsense. For me at least. You see, Love is a man's dream, and a woman's exercise.

MYRN. How interesting.

DOUG. A man in love —

MYRN. Have you ever been in love, Vern?

DOUG. Don't be so damned inquisitive.

MYRN. All right, I'll be still. Go on.

DOUG. A man in love is in a dream world, bounded on the north by his beloved's intellect, on the south by her physical charms, on the east by her personality, and on the west by her soul. Don't you think that's beautifully put?

MYRN. Very, go on.

DOUG. Well, a man in love is in that kind of a dream. It's a mysterious experience to him, thrilling, absorbing. He loses his own self exploring his sweetheart. He is completely merged in her. He sees the outside world through her, and it's dim. — That is, until he finds out that all women are the devil, including his sweetheart.

MYRN. Oh, my, my.

DOUG. Then he falls out of love like water down a rain spout, and becomes a model husband.

MYRN. This is very interesting. Do go on.

DOUG. A woman, on the other hand, is too much absorbed in her own feelings to go wandering around in any dream world. She is physical. Her dream is herself. Love is when she has found some one who treats her the way she wants to be treated, gives her the right kind of exercise — and keeps it up.

MYRN. You mean, a woman never loves anyone else? Just herself?

DOUG. Precisely.

MYRN. That's not so.

DOUG. No, of course not. The woman pays and pays. I know.

MYRN. Oh, not that either —

DOUG. Well?

MYRN. That isn't the way I feel about — John.

DOUG. Oh, I know, but let's not get too personal.

MYRN. Vern, that's nasty.

DOUG. It is nasty, isn't it? God, I hate those things!

MYRN. Don't believe them, Vern. They're not true anyhow.

DOUG. Aren't they?

MYRN. No.

DOUG. You don't mean that. Because I know they are true.

MYRN. Of course they are, in a way. But then, they don't have to be if you don't let them.

DOUG. I know what you mean. You want me to build me a nice little dream world and go live in it, don't you?

MYRN. I don't know if I can say it, Vern, but—you mustn't let things bother you that way. Why don't you try to interest yourself in your plays and ignore unpleasant things?

DOUG. I'd like to Myrn —

MYRN. Why don't you?

DOUG. But I can't. You're wrong. What are you trying to do, deceive me?

MYRN. Not a bit. I'm just trying to help you.

DOUG. You want me to shut my eyes to everything!

MYRN. Oh hush, Vern, its' not that at all.

DOUG. I won't hush. You can't talk like that to me. You, and John. John thinks I'm just a kid, that I've never grown up. He thinks my plays are just Indian games that we used to play when we were boys together. God, I can't stand that!

MYRN. Why, Vern, what's the matter with you?

DOUG. Nothing's the matter with me.

MYRN. Then why do you talk this way? What is it?

DOUG. Nothing. I don't know what it is. Just nothing I guess.

MYRN. Tell me more about your new play. Have you done any more on it?

DOUG. I don't feel like it. — It isn't anything, anyhow, just Indian games.

MYRN. You know I think it's wonderful.

DOUG. I know you think it's rotten. — Damn it!

MYRN. I wish you'd tell me. Have you had any more ideas?

DOUG. The Idealist stood before the mirror, saying, "There is an ideal." And so there was, until Butch

Baker came stomping into the room and stole little Petunia away from the big, bad man. — And there stood his grace, the gentle cynic, laughing, because he saw two men and one girl. And there were lots of Petunias that he didn't care a thing about.

MYRN. This is fascinating, Vern.

DOUG. Yes, isn't it?

MYRN. Is that part of the play?

DOUG. No — it was me. You see — there was a voice crying out in the wilderness —

MYRN. That's lovely!

DOUG. Myrn — !

MYRN. I'm sorry. Please go on.

DOUG. (*But he can't help a wry laugh*) Yes, there was a voice, crying in a real wilderness.

MYRN. That's interesting, but you haven't told me enough of the story.

DOUG. There isn't a story.

MYRN. But what does it mean?

DOUG. It means — worlds — and nothing. Things

only have a meaning when there are other things before and after.

MYRN. But what is it?

DOUG. It's nothing. It's just — no, I guess it's really nothing after all.

MYRN. I wish you'd tell me what it means, Vern. You're awfully queer today.

DOUG. That's why it's nothing. Let me tell you a story — Once, there was a man. He had a father. And his father had a father. See? But the man had two other men.

MYRN. But that's it. It doesn't make sense.

DOUG. Hush. It's sense all right.

MYRN. All right.

DOUG. The man had two other men; but he had a father and that man had a father before him so he was a real man. And so were the two men he had with him.
They lived in a tower.
It was a lovely tower that one of them had. And they had a glittering treasure. It was called Petunia.
Petunia was a treasure for two of them, particularly for

the one who owned the tower, but the third just didn't give a damn. He just laughed. She wasn't a treasure to him.

MYRN. She?

DOUG. They called her Petunia.

MYRN. Why didn't the third man like her?

DOUG. He laughed. He knew a thousand Petunias.

MYRN. Was he the cynic?

DOUG. If he was then there are two Petunias.

MYRN. But I thought you said there was only one?

DOUG. I thought so.

MYRN. Don't you know?

DOUG. I didn't think there was more than one. I always thought there was only one.

MYRN. You ought to know.

DOUG. How can I?

MYRN. What nonsense. Go on, tell me more about the treasure.

DOUG. I guess I'll have to. But this is the funny part. You see, it wasn't their treasure at all.

MYRN. Whose was it?

DOUG. It belonged to a parrot.

MYRN. That's awful nonsense, Vern.

DOUG. Well, it was a very good parrot. It didn't stay out late at night, and — and it lived in a very fine cage.

MYRN. Are you going to make a play out of this?

DOUG. No, it's too serious for a play.

MYRN. I was thinking, it would be hard to find a good parrot.

DOUG. Oh, that would be easy. Any actor could play the parrot.

MYRN. That wasn't funny.

DOUG. It wasn't meant to be. But the parrot wanted his treasure. He wanted to take it away from the man in the tower.

MYRN. I thought you said there were three.

DOUG. Oh yes, of course. But that was the trouble you see. If the treasure went, two of them had to die.

MYRN. What for?

DOUG. No reason; they just grew up that way.

MYRN. But that was silly.

DOUG. Of course, but that's the way with dream worlds. Funny things happen and you can't help it — and not so funny sometimes.

MYRN. And what happened to the treasure — Petunia — when the parrot took her?

DOUG. I don't know — he hasn't taken her yet — oh, just kept her in his cage, I guess. It was a very fine cage, you know. Perfectly marvelous trapeze, and all that.

MYRN. Poor Petunia. I don't like your story, Vern.

DOUG. I don't know. She was all right. It was pretty draughty up in that old tower.

MYRN. I don't like it just the same. What are you going to do with the story, make a play out of it?

DOUG. Perhaps. I may have to.

MYRN. I wouldn't, Vern. Can't you think of another story?

DOUG. Not just now.

MYRN. I wouldn't want you to use that one. Because —

DOUG. Why not?

MYRN. I don't know. Just — because.

DOUG. It isn't very happy, is it?

MYRN. No — that's why!

DOUG. Are you sure?

MYRN. Yes, quite. It wouldn't do to make people watch an unpleasant play, now would it?

DOUG. No, of course not. Pollyanna preferred. That's the formula!

MYRN. But you see, Vern, that's what I mean when I say you shouldn't let things bother you. That was a lovely story —

DOUG. But I thought you said you didn't like it?

MYRN. I don't, but it was wonderful.

DOUG. Oh yes, I know. "First act, big castle scene.

Thundering walls reaching up to a high tower! Below —"

MYRN. No. No! Vern, you drive me mad!

DOUG. Ah —?

MYRN. If you laugh at me I'll never forgive you.

DOUG. Dear Myrn, I won't laugh. I know you mean it all seriously. You've always been so kind to me, and you've cared for me as if I were a babe in swaddling clothes.

MYRN. You're hateful when you're that way. And it is true. I have cared for you. You're such a child, and you think you're all grown up!

DOUG. I'm dreadfully sorry. Really I am. But you see, — you've been my mirror. I've found so much of myself in you — and, I don't want John to turn you away, — to the wall.

MYRN. Hush —

DOUG. That's death — for me, at least. Remember the two men in the tower?

MYRN. Was that really a story, Vern?

DOUG. Perhaps not; but it really doesn't matter.

MYRN. Because, I'd rather not think it was, too much.

DOUG. Myrn — !

But the apartment buzzer interrupts.

MYRN. That's John!

DOUG. No, you must tell me.

MYRN. No Vern, please, I can't.

DOUG. You must, Myrn, must quickly. Tell me.

MYRN. No, I can't, I can't! Don't you see I — don't dare?

CATO *has been secretly Oriental, watching them, since the buzzer rang. Now he speaks coolly, from another world.*

CATO. That be Mr. Langdon. I go fetch bags.

DOUG. Yes, do. (*Then to* MYRN, *who has escaped to the mirror*) Coward! (*And there's hate in his voice*)

MYRN. I'm not very brave, am I?

DOUG. I guess it's goodby now. (*Offering his hand*)

MYRN. Don't be silly, Vern. (*And the impulse wins; she kisses him*)

DOUG. And the dying gladiator breathed his last! (*On the davenport*)

JOHN LANGDON *enters, very much the parrot, but just as much the sort of man women marry.*

JOHN. Hello everybody!

MYRN. Hello, John.

JOHN. Hello, dear. Miss me?

Of course, they do the natural thing; kiss.

MYRN. Of course I did.

JOHN. Hello Vern. How's everything been?

DOUG. OK, John.

JOHN. Cato been taking good care of you?

DOUG. Splendid. You'd be surprised what a woman-hound he's turned into since you've been away.

JOHN. Well, I hope you haven't taught him any bad habits. (*And to* MYRN) And how have you been amusing yourself?

MYRN. Oh, doing everything. Shopping —

CATO *glides through with the bags.*

And Vern took me to the concert Tuesday night —

VERN. Yes, and never suffered so much in all my life.

MYRN. Why, Vern.

DOUG. Murder will out — no really, I enjoyed it. A wonderful music critic this young lady is, John. Said she adored Mozart's emotional qualities.

MYRN. Vern, that's beastly. You promised you wouldn't tell.

JOHN. Secrets, young lady?

MYRN. No, of course not, but Vern promised not to give me away.

DOUG. How was your trip, John?

JOHN. Splendid. I did twice as much as I thought I would.

DOUG. Fine. Now you'll be able to say that you deserve your rest.

JOHN. You're quite right, and I'm going to take a long one.

DOUG. I'd shoot you if you didn't.

MYRN. So would I.

JOHN. Oh yes, I brought you something, Myrn.

MYRN. Oh lovely. What is it?

JOHN. I'll get it. It's in my suitcase.

While he is gone.

DOUG. And the bridegroom returned bringing precious gifts. I wish I had a wife like John.

MYRN. Maybe you will. But she'd be a fat sugar-mamma and you'd hate her.

DOUG. Of course, but I'd probably be in love with her maid.

MYRN. Hardly a noble revenge.

DOUG. Perhaps not, but twice as amusing.

JOHN. (*Returned*) Here it is. (*He uncovers a small oil painting from its wrappings*) I got it from Anderson. He said it was one of Tervini's early

Madonna's. I told him he was losing his eye. It's in the school right enough, but not a Tervini. Why, there's no line to it. But I liked the coloring so he let me have it for $400.

MYRN. Four hundred! Good Heavens.

JOHN. That's cheap. You don't get pictures of that period very often.

DOUG. I hate to think what I couldn't do with four hundred. The sins I'd visit on my children, even unto the fourth generation.

JOHN. Sell a play, Vern. There's money in that.

DOUG. Yes, after the first two or three, maybe. But producers don't seem to care for my dramatic olives.

JOHN. So it seems.

DOUG. Yes, doesn't it?

JOHN. Have you had tea, Myrn?

MYRN. No, Vern and I had cocktails.

DOUG. I thought we'd save tea until you came.

JOHN. I think I'd like some. We'll put this here in the meantime. (*Business of disposing of picture*

reverentially) Cato, bring in tea.

DOUG. (*To* CATO *who is just coming in*) Don't bother about me. I think I'll be off John.

MYRN. You don't have to go Vern.

DOUG. No, I'm sure you'd rather have me stay and amuse you, but I really have an engagement with a beautiful woman.

MYRN. Well, don't let us keep you.

DOUG. I'm late now. I'll have to run or she'll throw me over.

JOHN. We'll see you later Vern.

DOUG. Umm, doubtless.

He leaves as CATO *brings in tea things.*

JOHN. How have things been, Cato?

CATO. All right, sir.

JOHN. Vern been drinking much?

CATO. Yes sir, an' las' night —

JOHN. Never mind. I can guess.

MYRN. Vern does drink too much, doesn't he?

JOHN. Entirely too much to suit me. But tell me, how have you been?

MYRN. Oh all right.

JOHN. Do anything amusing?

MYRN. Nothing that would amuse you.

JOHN. How do you know?

MYRN. You wouldn't think it was fun to shop — not with me.

JOHN. I don't know. Not to shop, maybe, but with you —

MYRN. Don't be silly.

JOHN. Is that silly?

MYRN. Of course it is.

JOHN. Oh well, — I never knew anyone to squash incipient romanticism like you do, Myrn.

MYRN. Why I don't John. It just sounds sort of silly for you to be saying such things.

JOHN. I imagine it does. And I think I feel a little

silly saying them. But I don't mind. Do you?

MYRN. I don't know. It depends.

JOHN. How was your date with Vern?

MYRN. Which? Oh, the concert?

JOHN. I suppose so. Was there another?

MYRN. No, of course not. It was pleasant.

JOHN. Vern make good company at such things?

MYRN. Of course. I had a very nice time.

JOHN. What did they play?

MYRN. I forget. Oh, Mozart of course, but I don't remember what else.

JOHN. Couldn't have made much of an impression on you.

MYRN. I'm afraid I wasn't in the mood for it.

JOHN. What were you in the mood for?

MYRN. Oh, we went to the Tarleton afterward and danced. Vern's a wonderful dancer, you know.

JOHN. Yes, I know he is. If there is any useless

grace that man has it. Can't make money, can't write a decent play, nor do a single honest thing, but he can dance and make flippant remarks and be a magnificent social lion.

MYRN. Why, John!

JOHN. Well — isn't that right?

MYRN. I think his plays are wonderful.

JOHN. Rot!

MYRN. They are, too. He's read them to me.

JOHN. Why doesn't he sell them then?

MYRN. Why, because, because, they're "out of the modern tradition".

JOHN. Yes, I expect they are, "out of the modern tradition". Ultra-modern, I dare say.

MYRN. I guess so.

JOHN. But when was this?

MYRN. What?

JOHN. That he read his plays to you?

MYRN. Oh, that was last Thursday.

JOHN. Just after I left!

MYRN. Yes. Didn't I say so in my letter Sunday?

JOHN. No, you never mentioned it.

MYRN. I thought I had. We had lunch together and he read them to me afterward, up here.

JOHN. Up here?

MYRN. Yes, of course. Was there anything wrong in that?

JOHN. No . . . Oh, damn it, Myrn! . . . . Come sweet one, give me a kiss. I haven't kissed you since I got back.

MYRN. Why, you did, at the door.

JOHN. Oh, yes, but that was — ah — for the benefit of the public.

MYRN. And this — ?

JOHN. Is for private performance. Do you love me, Honey?

MYRN. Yes.

JOHN. All?

MYRN. I think so.

JOHN. Not sure?

MYRN. I don't know. Can anyone be?

JOHN. I am.

MYRN. Yes, you are, John, because you know yourself so well.

JOHN. Does it have to be "John"?

MYRN. Dear, then.

JOHN. Not if it's an effort for you.

MYRN. Why, of course not, dear. See?

JOHN. You're sweet. — Myrn! Are you thinking what I am?

MYRN. What? You mean our wedding?

JOHN. Yes.

MYRN. Isn't it hectic? I've never done so much shopping in all my life!

JOHN. Sorry?

MYRN. No, of course not.

JOHN. Not a bit?

MYRN. Why should I be?

JOHN. No reason — except that after that there won't be much —

MYRN. Yes, I know.

JOHN. You'll be on the other side of the fence, you know.

MYRN. Yes, and all my friends will start calling me Mrs. Langdon, and —

JOHN. "Mrs. Langdon" —(*he likes it*)

MYRN. — and all the boys I know will look at me as if I were a foreigner or something. I want to keep my friends, John.

JOHN. Yes. I won't drive them away, will I?

MYRN. No — But Vern said a sort of goodby to me just before you came in.

JOHN. He did?!

MYRN. Yes.

JOHN. Well, shouldn't he have?

MYRN. No. I don't want him to think that because I'm marrying you —

JOHN. Well, you're not marrying him you know.

MYRN. But why should that make any difference between us?

JOHN. Because — damn it, Myrn, just what is your idea? Are you insulting my intelligence, or don't you know what you're doing?

MYRN. Why, John.

JOHN. What's your feeling for Vern? Tell me.

MYRN. But we've talked about that and I tell you it doesn't make any difference. I don't love him.

JOHN. Maybe not, but I love you.

MYRN. Well?

JOHN. Does he still fascinate you?

MYRN. I wish I'd never told you.

JOHN. That wouldn't have made any difference. I should have seen it.

MYRN. Why, I don't — ?

JOHN. No, of course not, consciously. But it's the little things, the unconscious things you do without noticing, that give you away. Like when we're standing together you want to touch his arm, to talk to him. When we walk you take his arm. I take yours.

MYRN. But you're taller, John.

JOHN. Little things like that make me want to kill him. I like Vern, but you're making me hate him. I'm trying to help him along, and all the time I want to kill him, to get him out of the way and smash that feeling that's between you.

MYRN. Are you trying to hurt me?

JOHN. I don't care. D'you suppose I haven't been hurt? I know what I am. I'm a convenience for you, quiet and in the background. You don't love me, any more than you do Vern. You just know you'll need me more, and you're too clever to let yourself think about him — not because you know I'll find out, but because you want to spare yourself the pain.

MYRN. John, if you're trying to drive me to Vern you're succeeding very well.

JOHN. I'm not, darling. I love you. Oh, I love you.

MYRN. Then why do you talk this way?

JOHN. Don't you see, darling, that it's because I love you so much, so damned completely, that I can't take you unless —

MYRN. Unless what?

JOHN. Unless you feel the same way.

MYRN. Oh, I see.

JOHN. Please, dear, don't misunderstand.

MYRN. You mean you don't trust me.

JOHN. Of course I trust you. I know you too well to think you'd go around — (*telephone rings*) Oh, damn that bell!

(*Answering*) Hello. Oh yes, Vern.

Yes, she's here. Why?

All right. Come on up.

(*To* MYRNA) I guess Vern's date has backed out on him. He's coming up. (*Returning to the original discussion*) Don't you see what I mean, dear?

MYRN. Yes, I see perfectly.

JOHN. Honey — (*pleading*)

MYRN. Never mind. Vern will be here in a minute. (*With false gaiety*) And you know I'm quite safe, John.

As DOUGLAS *enters.*

Hello, Vern.

DOUG. Hello, Myrna. Pardon me for breaking in, John, but I'm not staying. I just wanted to leave this coat here. I guess I'll go down to the lobby and find the evening paper. Don't let me disturb you.

MYRN. But you're not. John and I were just having a talk about me.

DOUG. Yes? What did he say? Or is that any of my business?

MYRN. It might be. He said he knew that I was safe.

DOUG. Well, aren't you?

MYRN. I suppose so, but I don't like it.

DOUG. Show me the woman who does. That damn woman of mine . . . . .

JOHN. Why, what happened?

DOUG. I don't know. She probably found some other sucker and went with him. You can't trust any of them, damn 'em.

MYRN. John doesn't trust me either, but he thinks I'm perfectly safe.

DOUG. Which is just about right.

MYRN. Well!

DOUG. I'm sorry, Myrn. I didn't mean it quite that way. I'd better go before I say any more terrible things. Au 'voir.

Exit.

JOHN. Thank God!

MYRN. What for?

JOHN. For the birds, and the trees, and the flowers!

MYRN. John!

JOHN. I'm sorry dear, — but you don't know how it makes me feel to have Vern around, anywhere, near you. It's sort of stifling.

MYRN. I think that's silly.

JOHN. It isn't. I can't stand —

MYRN. Well, you know yourself I'm perfectly safe.

JOHN. Myrn, please. You don't understand. (*Telephone rings again*) Oh Lord! (*Answers*) Yes?

Yes, yes, Burton. What is it?

Well?

But Good Lord, Thompson can take care of that.

He isn't? Why not?!

Oh. — Well, all right. I'll be down in a few minutes.

(*Hangs up the receiver and turns to* MYRNA)

You heard it. Things are in a mess, and I've got to go down to the office and straighten them out.

MYRN. What do you want me to do?

JOHN. I thought we could take dinner together.

MYRN. I'm tired.

JOHN. What do you want to do?

MYRN. Well, I thought I could wait here for you and rest, and then we could eat somewhere quiet. (*A puzzled look from* JOHN) Oh, I know I'm not dressed, but you won't mind will you, if we go to some small place?

JOHN. No, of course not. (*Still the puzzlement*) You'll be quite all right?

MYRN. Why, of course.

JOHN. Ah — well, Vern's downstairs. Do you want me to send him up?

MYRN. Oh no, you needn't bother. I'll just lie here and rest (— *which shatters the puzzlement until it recollects itself into a forgetting smile*)

JOHN. Well, all right. I'll be back in about an hour. Goodby dear. (*A kiss*)

MYRN. Goodby.

Exit JOHN LANGDON.

Then follows pantomine expressive of a personality afraid to face aloneness and eager to dance on the edge of a cliff as an escape from it. The risk is breath-tak-

ing, obviously, from the telephone conversation which is the capped climax of her growing resolution.

Give me the desk.

Page Mr. Vernon Douglas, please.

Vern? This is Myrna speaking.

Ah — is the newspaper interesting?

Why don't you come up and amuse me then?

Oh, John had to go to the office for a while.

Yes, it is a shame, isn't it?

All right. (*Until he comes,* MYRNA *makes herself beautiful*)

Enter VERNON DOUGLAS.

MYRN. You see, Vern, the parrot is gone — and the door of "the very fine cage" is left open —

DOUG. Petunia —

Black-out in an awful hurry; to last two minutes.

SCENE II

IT *is now an hour or more later. Conversation comes with the impression that it is something remembered from day-before-yesterday; something thin and crisp has burned to a bright ash while the curtain was down and the two are talking to hide it from each other.*

MYRN. I don't know what I would have done without you, Vern.

DOUG. Women are notoriously bad company for themselves, aren't they?

MYRN. I suppose so.

DOUG. Present company excepted —

MYRN. Thank you. I hardly expected that.

DOUG. I can say nice things when I want to.

MYRN. I don't doubt that you can say them.

DOUG. Come, come. I haven't been so nasty, have I?

MYRN. Not this afternoon at least. Vern, you were sweet.

DOUG. Thanks. I might have been sweeter if you'd let me.

MYRN. I'm afraid so. But then —

DOUG. Things don't seem to happen that way, do they?

MYRN. The way I feel now — almost anything might happen still — but then, it doesn't, does it? I mean, we live the way we must in spite of our desires, don't we?

DOUG. A couple of remarks on environment seem to be in order. Shall I make them?

MYRN. No thanks. But isn't that true?

DOUG. I've often wondered. Sometimes — it seems like I can see myself through gold-curtained windows, doing glittering things like a hero, and I go on and on, from one magnificent triumph to another, until confusion comes. Seems strange that we can't mix dreams and life. We live in dreams. Why do we always have to smash them to go on living? You or John would say it was because life is a sort of string, that begins away back and carries far forward. You can't interrupt it with random dreams. But then, you're moralists. You think there's meaning to life. That

there are purposes.
Tell me, are you glorifying God, Myrn?

MYRN. What for?

DOUG. Beautiful! "What for?" But what I mean is, are you living according to your moral principles?

MYRN. I hope so. I try.

DOUG. If I wanted to be unpleasant I could remind you that you nearly failed this afternoon. — but I won't. Only, I can't understand why I didn't insist on doing as I pleased myself. It would have been another dream for me, come true for once, — and then forgotten.

MYRN. Would you have forgotten me?

DOUG. Naturally. Dreams flash, they're lovely, and they're gone. You would have been lovely, Myrn. Just one dream. I should probably never have thought of you again.

MYRN. That's hardly flattering. (*But you forgive her the utter banality because it comes, dredged hurriedly for conversation's sake, from an abstraction in the might-have-beens that is deeper than* VERN'S *and so, less wordy*)

DOUG. No, you wouldn't think so. But then, why not? Why not do the immediate, the pleasant thing — and then forget it? Instead of being all tied up in a knot like you are, worrying about the past and the future of things, mostly unpleasant.

MYRN. Oh, you're being morbid. (*Which is also her own indictment of herself*)

DOUG. A dreamer's privilege, I suppose. But then as the old saying is, "What the Hell!" I'll probably dream another dream some day.

MYRN. Surely, and it will be much more beautiful.

DOUG. Do you think so?

MYRN. I know it.

DOUG. That's a comfort —

For a moment they both tie up loose ends of thought; then, the play goes on.

John's a little afraid of me, isn't he?

MYRN. What makes you ask that?

DOUG. Isn't he?

MYRN. He acts as if he were more afraid of me.

DOUG. That's so silly.

MYRN. I wonder.

DOUG. I suppose you're right. But then, you're you. You don't dream. I can make all manner of fool of myself, but you can't. The moralities save you. He should know that.

MYRN. I suppose he feels that not even the moralities are strong enough to stop you.

DOUG. What a tribute. I assure you, "All that I am I owe to my mother."
But John should be here if you say he was only to be gone an hour. Do you want me to go?

MYRN. Not a bit. You stay right here. I think I'm going to teach him a lesson.

DOUG. Poor John. But you won't succeed.

MYRN. I certainly shall.

DOUG. My God, such determination. Maybe it's a good thing you don't dream. What a mess your life would be.

MYRN. I think I prefer the moralities, if that's what you call them.

DOUG. They're safer, certainly.

Enter John.

JOHN. Hello, dear. I'm sorry I'm late. (*Seeing* VERN) Oh, you're here.

DOUG. Strangely enough, I am.

And here JOHN *begins to climb mountains of emotion, which he is much too inbred to let become melodramic — and which rattle like pea-shots on* DOUG'S *indifference.*

JOHN. (*To* MYRN) I thought you wanted to rest.

MYRN. Of course I did.

DOUG. Something pointed about that remark.

MYRN. But I thought Vern would be amusing.

JOHN. You couldn't have been very tired.

DOUG. I'm a great sedative to the spirits John, if you only knew it.

JOHN. I never found you so.

MYRN. Did you get things straightened out at the office?

JOHN. No.

MYRN. You don't have to go back again, do you?

JOHN. Unfortunately for you, maybe, no, I don't!

MYRN. That remark was hardly necessary.

JOHN. If you remember what I said —

DOUG. (*Crossing behind* MYRNA *and stroking her hair*) Nice pussy, nice pussy, don't scratch.

JOHN. Get away from there!

DOUG. I was only trying to comfort the poor little girl. You're so brutal, John.

JOHN. I'll be grateful to you if you'll be still!

MYRN. There's no need to be rude to Vern just because you're in a nasty temper.

JOHN. I'm not in a temper. But I'm so infernally sick of your hypocrisy —

DOUG. (*Breaks in*) John, don't be an ass.

JOHN. (*As if he were throwing the world at him*)

You, shut up! (*Then to* MYRN) If you remember what I said —

MYRN. Yes dear, I remember what you said perfectly. Come here and sit down beside me. I want to talk to you.

JOHN. Will you be so good —

DOUG. (*Again trying to rescue him*) Oh, for God's sake, John!

JOHN. (*To* MYRNA) If you think you can pull the wool over my eyes —

MYRN. Nobody's trying to pull anything over your eyes. Come, sit beside me. (*And he finally submits*) After our big fuss a little while ago you thought you could go away and then come back to find everything changed and me a different person, didn't you?

JOHN. Well, I certainly didn't expect to find you with him, particularly after what I —

MYRN. No, of course not. But I called Vern up for a particular reason.

DOUG. (*Speaking just conversationally to the furniture*) Quite so. Very particular.

MYRN. And we've been talking about our affairs.

JOHN. You mean, yours and mine?

MYRN. No, not quite, but nearly.

JOHN. Well, I must say!

MYRN. Now don't get huffy.

JOHN. But my dear child, our own affairs —

MYRN. And Vern's —

DOUG. (*Still furniture minded*) Yes, and mine —

MYRN. And I've decided!

JOHN. What?

DOUG. (*Like a hero, to the rescue*) That the moralities —

MYRN. Vern, be still. (*To* JOHN) That you're perfectly silly to feel the way you do. I love you. Only you, John. Please believe me.

DOUG. You see, John. It's a case of dreams versus —

JOHN. Oh, shut up! (*To* MYRNA) I believe you, dear one.

DOUG. Again I'm told to shut up!

JOHN. (*Very much to* MYRNA) I love you.

DOUG. Once more you tell me to shut up and I'll be offended. Do you hear that, John?

JOHN. (*To* DOUG *like one in a dream*) What? Oh — (*To* MYRNA) And you'll forgive me?

MYRN. Of course. But it's you ought to forgive me.

DOUG. It's a case of dreams versus reality, John. You can dream and dream lovely things if you want to, but there is always the reality of the moralities to bring you back to earth. In my own case . . . . *but he sees that they are much too deep in each other so a gesture of futility brings, slowly, the*

Curtain

LIZ. Curious? That's too bad.

MY MAN

by JEROME F. MCCARTHY, '29

CAST

LIZ	*Rose Varkle*
BOODLES	*Charles Holden*
GEORGE	*A. Wallace Baxter*
ELSIE	*Helen Workman*
"RED" HURLEY	*R. Sterling Cole*

PLACE. *A cheap restaurant and lunch-counter in a small town north of Indianapolis.*

TIME. *Between eleven and twelve at night, just before closing time.*

THE *action takes place in this restaurant-lunch-counter that closely resembles the common roadside barbecue-lunch, but is much dirtier than most of them.*

In the center, back, is a large window. On it the word "LUNCH" is written in large letters, reversed. To the right of the window is a door leading to the street. Down-stage, directly in front of the door, is a rough old table surrounded by three or four badly scarred chairs. Against the wall, on a line with the table, is a player-piano — the kind that is used in places where a nickel's worth of music is considered a royal treat. Left-stage

is occupied by a counter over which lunches are served. Behind the counter one can see numerous cooking utensils and a small gas stove. In front of the counter are three or four stools.

As the curtain rises two men are sitting at a table playing cards and taking an occasional drink from a bottle before them. One of the men, BOODLES, *is a short, chubby fellow with gold teeth that glitter everytime he laughs. He wears a pair of spectacles that are anything but becoming. The other,* GEORGE, *is a long, lazy-acting, blank-faced, bleary-eyed sot who obviously does not know what everything is all about, and as a consequence says little and does less.*

LIZ *is back of the counter, her chin resting in her hands as she pours over the rotogravure section of a Sunday paper. Her features are those of a hard woman, yet she is at times a bit sad and wistful.*

The piano is playing a piece that the audience may recognize in spite of the discords — any popular "hit". A few minutes after the curtain rises the music dies out.

BOODLES. Oh, hell, George, you could play that game all night and not get anywhere. (*Throws down his cards and gets up*) Two can't play that game.

GEORGE. Yah, I ain't arguing with you. Let's quit. If I won you'd have to borrow it all, and if you won we'd have to quit because I'm broke.

BOODLES. (*Goes over to the piano and drops a coin*) How about a little music? (*After much wheezing and grinding the music begins to come*)

LIZ. Gee, it sounds like the bellows in a blacksmith shop.

GEORGE. Say, Boo, you should have been a musician. You drop so many nickels in those damned things I'm going to buy a bale of cotton to carry around for self-defense.

LIZ. Well maybe if he was a musician he wouldn't play that lousy-sounding thing all the time. Earmuffs would be easier to carry around than a bale of cotton, George.

BOODLES. (*Hurt*) Since when did your musical taste get so developed? I didn't suppose you could tell one piece from another.

LIZ. And if I can't? I'm so sick of hearing that damned thing I'm going to ask the boss the next time I see him to take it off out in the country somewhere and bury it.

The music stops.

BOODLES. Well, see what's happened? You talk so rough about it that it stops. You're a hot one, you are.

GEORGE, *who was not interested in the discussion from the beginning, has fallen asleep.*

BOODLES. (*Reaching in his pocket*) I don't want to be disagreeable, but I must have music. I crave music. Aw shucks. I haven't any nickels.

LIZ. That's all right. Use quarters.

BOODLES. Yah. Why you don't even get a nickel's worth out of those rolls any more. I think they must be cut in two to make two rolls. Here Liz, give me some change.

LIZ. (*Mockingly*) I don't want to be disagreeable in the least, but I can't give you any nickels.

BOODLES. Well, I'll be a—(*Goes over to the sleeping* GEORGE *and shakes him*) George, have you got any nickels?

GEORGE. (*Gazes up stupidly*) Bank . . . right around the corner . . . first door on the right . . .

You can't miss it. (*He sinks back again*)

BOODLES. Well, can you tie that? (*Blustering*) Here Liz give me some nickels or I'll tell the boss.

LIZ. Go ahead, I'd tell him myself if I had occasion to.

BOODLES. What? Why he'd fire you in a jiffy. He fired Lily Hudson for sassing a customer, and the customer was so drunk he didn't know whether he was coming or going.

LIZ. Well, he won't get a chance to fire me. I'm quitting next week.

BOODLES. (*Astonished*) You are? What's the matter now?

LIZ. I'm going to get married.

BOODLES. (*Whistles softly*) Well I'll be a little pollywog. Going to get married. Who in blazes is the poor — ah — I mean who's the lucky guy?

LIZ. Curious? That's too bad.

BOODLES. No I'm not curious. I just wanted to know, that's all.

LIZ. Sure, I understand. Merely interested, eh?

BOODLES. Aw come on, Liz —

LIZ. (*Impatiently*) Don't bawl. Curiosity killed a calf, you know.

BOODLES. You think you're smart don't you? (*Peeved*) Well, I don't care who it is anyway.

LIZ. You're just wasting your time, Boo. You couldn't find out from me if you sat there all night.

BOODLES. (*Pleadingly*) Gosh, Liz, I wouldn't tell a soul, not even George here. (*Indicates the sleeping* GEORGE) Besides we've been good friends for a long time. Fact is, I was almost ready to ask you to marry me once last summer. Then I met Elsie and she just turned my head around. Gosh, she sure is some girl.

LIZ. Well you're about the frankest of the love-lorn saps I've met in my day. Elsie thinks about as much of you as I did. And if you start any of the mush stuff on her, she'll turn you off almost as quick as I would have.

BOODLES. Aw gee, now you're sore at me. I never know what to say, do I? That's why I always keep still. And when a fellow always keeps still he's

never going to know what to say, is he? Well, I guess that's the way things go. (*Recovering*) But, say, you're all wrong about Elsie. She thinks I'm the best guy she ever met. Why one night I found her fixing a tire out east of town about three miles. I got the tire fixed about twelve-thirty, and then we had the sweetest little necking party you ever seen.

LIZ. Oh, — I see. So that's where you learned to like her so much.

BOODLES. Yah, that's where it was all right. I never knew before how much she liked me. Gee, she's been waiting for years to meet a guy like me.

LIZ. (*Sarcastically*) Well I haven't any doubt about that. Have you been out with Elsie since?

BOODLES. No, you see she'd got all dated up for weeks ahead never thinking she'd get so well acquainted with me. I told her to break all these dates, but I guess she's too honest to do a thing like that. That's why I like her. She always tells the truth and never beats around the bush like some of them do. That's a real girl, Liz.

LIZ, *who has absent-mindedly been drumming the counter with her fingers, has, in the last few moments,*

become tense. For an instant, a look of terror flashes across her face and is gone.

BOODLES. Say, you're not even listening.

LIZ. Yes I'm listening. (*Partly to herself*) God it's queer. I wonder if everything is like that . . . . dishonest . . . . no way of knowing what's true and what ain't. God, maybe . . . that would be awful . . .

BOODLES. (*Summoning courage to speak*) Gosh, Liz, what's the matter with you? What's come over you all of a sudden?

LIZ. Oh, nothing, nothing. I was just talking.

BOODLES. Here I was, raving about Elsie and all of a sudden you go off on some crazy chatter or other. Gosh.

LIZ. Oh, I just thought of something, that's all. You said something that kind of touched me off. Never mind me.

BOODLES. I sure touched something off, all right.

There is an awkward pause. Neither knows what to say.

LIZ. Say, Boo, do you mind answering a few questions?

BOODLES. Gee, no, if I can.

LIZ. Do you believe if a person tells you something right out and out, it's true?

BOODLES. Oh sure. That is, if they are not joking.

LIZ. Do you believe that if a man tells a woman, "from now on it's just us two, baby" — do you think he could be lying?

BOODLES. Gosh, no, it doesn't seem so. Still it all depends on who says it, and how they say it. If the man was the sort that ran around with a lot of bims, I wouldn't count much on it. But then if he was all steamed up when he said it, and he sounded as if he was telling the truth — then I'd believe him. Those are what counts when someone tells you something.

LIZ. Yes, that's what counts of course. But then don't you sometimes think a person is sincere if you want awfully much to believe them?

BOODLES. Oh, I guess so. (*Thinks a moment*) Gosh, sure, that's right, too. Say, what are you driving at, anyway?

LIZ. Nothing.

BOODLES. Gee, I never knew you were so queer before. I'm sure glad Elsie ain't that way.

LIZ. You know Elsie pretty well, don't you?

BOODLES. Oh, you bet.

LIZ. You believe all she tells you, don't you?

BOODLES. Gosh, yes — why — say, I see what you've been driving at. You've been asking me all these questions to find out if I was really sure that Elsie liked me. (*Indulgently*) You may think you're pretty smart, but you couldn't put one over on me, could you? (*Chuckles*) Couldn't fool old Boodles, eh? (*Chuckles again*)

LIZ. No, you're a smart man, Boodles.

BOODLES. Now you're talking.

LIZ *busies herself at wiping off the counter and hanging up some cooking utensils.*

LIZ. (*Apparently disinterested*) Say, Boodles, you know Red Hurley, don't you?

BOODLES. Red Hurley? Oh sure. Him and me have been on more than one party together.

LIZ. Oh you have? You know him pretty well then, don't you?

BOODLES. Gosh, I'll say.

LIZ. What sort of a fellow is he, anyway?

BOODLES. Oh gee, he's great.

LIZ. (*Brightening*) Is he really?

BOODLES. You bet. He's only got one thing wrong with him. Outside of that there ain't a better man in this part of the country.

LIZ. What's the matter with him, Boodles?

BOODLES. Drink. Gosh, I never seen a guy that could drink like him. I sure wouldn't want to be like him. It costs a fortune to get him drunk.

LIZ. That's bad. Does he drink often?

BOODLES. Not very. He can't afford it. Why about two weeks ago, Red, and me, and two other guys were over to Spud's drinking beer. Red said, "Let's have a whiskey, boys." And do you know what he did? Instead of drinking all around the table at the same time, he took each one of us separate and drank a full whiskey with us, one at a time. And then — gee

I don't see how he did it — but all of us passed out and he kept right on drinking. I never saw the beat. But there's one thing I don't like about Red. He gets awful mean when he's drunk. He's always ugly and wants a fight. He's beat up a lot of guys when he's been drunk. I don't know of course, but I hear he's even worse with the women when he's drunk. That's bad.

LIZ. Yes, that is bad. (*Partly to herself*) I wonder if he'll break off?

BOODLES. Huh? Break off? No, he won't break off now. Said he'd swear off when he got married.

LIZ. (*Excitedly*) Did he say that? Did you hear him say that?

BOODLES. Sure, I've heard him say it lots of times. He always said so. But he said if his wife ever drank a drop he'd twist her into rope. I can't understand, because all the girls he's ever gone with could drink more than George over here.

LIZ. Has he gone with many girls that you know of?

BOODLES. Oh gosh — dozens. He's a bear for the women. They like him too. He makes them feel insignificant. He says they like that. That's funny

ain't it?

LIZ. Yes, it is funny.

BOODLES. But they don't all fall for that. Believe me, Elsie don't tumble for that line.

LIZ. (*Surprised*) Did Elsie go with him once?

BOODLES. No, she went with him twice and came back with him once. The second time out he was kind of tight and started some rough stuff. She biffed him in the eye and got out and walked the four miles from Cook's Corners back to town. Gosh, was she mad! And how. I'll bet she'd sock him now if she met him on the street.

LIZ. So that's why she never had any use for him.

BOODLES. Yah, that's partly why. There's something else, though. Guess he ditched her once, or something. She'd never tell me what it was. Always said she wanted one good chance. Don't know what she meant, though.

LIZ. Well, she hasn't much use for him.

BOODLES. It's his own fault. "Shucks, Red," I says to him, "you don't know how to handle her. If I

had her, I'd soon show you." And ain't it the truth? Ain't I showing him now?

LIZ. Yes, you certainly are. I'm sure you can teach him a lot, Boodles.

BOODLES. I sure can all right. After all, Red's a darned good scout. Got his faults — all of us have. You know I think the right kind of a woman could tame him down. Someone had ought to marry him and try. No one will ever know any other way.

LIZ. You're right there. No one will ever know any other way.

BOODLES. (*Grinning*) Say, Liz, you'd make a good woman for Red.

LIZ. (*Eagerly*) Do you think so, Boodles?

BOODLES. Sure. Seriously I do.

LIZ. Why?

BOODLES. Oh, I don't know. You seem to be the right kind of a woman for a man like him. You've quieted down a lot yourself lately. You know, from what you say, I think you understand human nature pretty well. There's a lot of things you say about people that are the very things I've been thinking my-

self. And besides that, you always seemed to have a lot of patience. Whoever gets Red will sure have to have a lot of patience, all right. Shucks, why get married now? You might get better acquainted with Red and change your mind about the guy you're quitting this job to marry.

LIZ. I've made up my mind, Boo. I'm going to get married to the man I picked out. He has his faults. We all have, like you say. But he's a lot like Red — he needs a woman to straighten him out.

BOODLES. Well I think it's pretty hard to straighten a man out after he's married. His mind is too set to change.

LIZ. You're wrong there, Boo. A man can't even get married in the first place without having a lot of his ideas changed. If the woman isn't smart enough to make her man over, she's out of luck and the thing is a flop. That's why so many of them break up — the woman ain't smart enough to make her man believe he is having his own way. If she was, she could make him like her medicine. Sounds funny, doesn't it? But I've seen it happen too many times not to know.

BOODLES. (*Bewildered*) Gosh, yes. Say, what were we talking about, anyway?

There is a slight pause as ELSIE *is seen going by the window. She enters, presently, with a swagger. She has the appearance of a rather "hard" type of woman of about twenty-three. There is none of* LIZ' *wistfulness in her face. She is at once carefree, flippant, and cruel.*

ELSIE. (*Going over and tapping* BOODLES *softly under the chin*) How's Boo tonight? Been flirting with Liz, I see.

BOODLES. Oh, Gosh, you don't think I'd flirt with her —

LIZ. Well, I like that.

BOODLES. I — I mean you don't think I'd flirt with anybody, do you?

ELSIE. (*Dryly*) Well, hardly. I was only joking.

BOODLES. Gosh, I'm glad of that. You sure had me going for a second.

ELSIE. Did I? Well that's too bad. You're just a little bashful, aren't you?

BOODLES. Oh no, I just lack for words, that's all. You know I think working in a garage makes me that way.

ELSIE. Oh, do you? Well I think you blame the garage for a little too much, if anyone should ask me.

BOODLES. Well, yes and no.

ELSIE. What?

BOODLES. Yes and no.

ELSIE. I think so, too.

BOODLES. What's that? Think what?

ELSIE. Yes and no.

BOODLES. (*Floored*) Oh.

LIZ. I was sure surprised at some of it, though. I didn't know before, eh Boo?

BOODLES *moves uneasily.*

ELSIE. Really? All the latest scandal, I suppose.

LIZ. I was sure surprised at some of it, though. I bet you would be, too.

BOODLES. Aw, can't you keep still?

LIZ. From what he said, I guess you know all about it, so there's no use in telling you. (LIZ *winks at* ELSIE)

BOODLES. (*Louder than before*) Aw gosh, Liz, cut it out. If you don't I'm going home.

LIZ. All right, Boodles, I won't tell a word.

ELSIE. Hey, that ain't fair. Now I won't tell you the one I heard about Boodles and Kitty Stern.

BOODLES. (*Almost frantic*) Here, stop. That ain't fair. I'm going home. (*He starts for his hat*)

ELSIE. Didn't you hear that one? Well, it certainly is worth listening to, believe me.

BOODLES. (*Almost at the top of his voice*) Hey, stop.

ELSIE. Louder. Well, what's the matter? (*Goes to him coyly*) Is mama's big boy 'bused?

BOODLES. (*Pouting*) I want you two to quit talking about me.

ELSIE. We'll not say another word. (*She puts her arm around his neck*) Somebody's tired and cross. Better go home and get some sleep. That's what you get for being such a night-hawk. Go?

BOODLES. (*All smiles*) Sure. Anything you say, Elsie. I thought for a while you were sore at me.

You're not are you?

ELSIE. Course not. Now run home. (*She kisses him loudly on the cheek and pushes him away, feminine fashion*)

BOODLES *goes to the table and shakes and calls* GEORGE *until the latter begins to show signs of life by a series of strange gutteral noises.*

BOODLES. (*Turning to* LIZ) Liz, you know what you said about believing a thing when you wanted to? Well, I think you were right on that one.

He goes out. GEORGE *finally manages to stagger to his feet. He sways back and forth in an effort to reach the door. Just as he grasps the door-frame, he steadies himself for a moment, and in a very audible mutter, says, "Well I'll be God-damned!" He staggers out.*

ELSIE. Whew. I'm glad that's gone. How do you ever stand him?

LIZ. Oh, he isn't so bad. Just kind of dumb in some ways, that's all. Knows enough in others, though.

ELSIE. I don't know what others you mean, but I sure hope he does for his own sake.

LIZ. You don't like him much, do you?

ELSIE. Him? Say what do you think I am, anyhow?

LIZ. I noticed you kissed him a while ago, that's why I asked.

ELSIE. Well, that doesn't mean anything, does it?

LIZ. No, of course not. But I don't see why you are playing with him of all people.

ELSIE. Oh, you don't? Well I need a new set of tires for my wheelbarrow, and since he's working in a garage I don't see why I shouldn't get a set free. Do you?

LIZ. The poor devil. You sure get what you want, don't you?

ELSIE. You bet I do. And why shouldn't I, if he's willing? He's just like the rest of the breed — all saps.

LIZ. What breed? Men, you mean?

ELSIE. Yah, they're all boobs, every one of them.

LIZ. I don't believe that.

ELSIE. Well what do you think of that? They're not all saps. (*Chuckles*)

LIZ. No.

ELSIE. And who isn't, if I may ask?

LIZ. My man isn't.

ELSIE. Well I'll be a —"My man". That sounds bad. "Men" always sounds better to my little ears. I hope you're not married already.

LIZ. No, not yet, but just as soon as possible, I can tell you.

ELSIE. While we're on the subject, may I ask who the one and only is?

LIZ. I guess you know him all right — Red Hurley?

ELSIE. That thing. (*Disgustedly*) God, are you still playing with him?

LIZ. You bet I am. I'm going to marry him, too. What have you got against Red anyway?

ELSIE. Oh, not a thing. Not a thing. Say, kid, you are kind of green, aren't you?

LIZ. Well, I know he's my man, and I'm sure satisfied with him.

ELSIE. You would be.

LIZ. Don't think I ain't seen a good many. And he's

got them all beat a mile.

ELSIE. That doesn't necessarily mean so much.

LIZ. Well, it does in this case. The trouble is you really don't know Red.

ELSIE. Oh, don't I? You'd be surprised how well I know that baby.

LIZ. I heard about that. Well, Red spends plenty of dough on me, and he doesn't gripe about it like some guys do, either. And besides, I've never had to get out and walk home.

ELSIE. Is that so? Well that's probably the difference between us.

LIZ. I've never had any reason to get out and walk, thank you. I'm not that kind of a girl, and Red knows it.

ELSIE. Oh, sure. We all know that.

There is a slight pause, neither wishing to speak first.

LIZ. Aw listen, Elsie, let's quit the jawing. We've been pards too long to let something start now.

ELSIE. Who started this? I suppose I did. All right, let's quit.

LIZ. That's better. Let's talk sense. Gee, I'm just dying for someone to talk to. At least for someone to listen to me.

ELSIE. I'm sorry. I guess you are in love and not responsible. Isn't that it?

LIZ. Well, I'm in love.

ELSIE. How does it feel?

LIZ. Funny. I've known lots of men, but Red's the first one I've really loved.

ELSIE. You're sure you love him?

LIZ. Positively. I've never felt this way before. It's a sort of funny feeling . . . something you can't explain.

ELSIE. Yah, so I've heard. I've never felt that way and I never will. Well, I wish you luck. (*They shake hands*) Is Red going to stay here and work, or is he going to get a new job?

LIZ. He's got a job waiting for him in Spotsford, Michigan. We're going to go just as soon as we can rent a house.

ELSIE. A house. What are you going to do with a

house? Red ain't going to bring any of his stray kids up there to live, is he?

LIZ. Aw cut that, will you? How do you know there is any truth to that stuff?

ELSIE. You'd be sure surprised at some of the things I could tell you about that bird.

LIZ. Well, Elsie, you can't scare me out. I'm going to get married, and nothing under the sun can stop me. I'm getting a house so I can have a home of my own. We can take in roomers to pay the rent, and I'll get some kind of work that will let me stay home most of the time. I'm sick of this racket. All you do is get kicked around, and kicked around, until after a while you're a back number.

ELSIE. It's your own fault if you get kicked around. I don't, do I?

LIZ. Well, you see, I'm in love besides. It's queer, Elsie, damned queer, but I've felt awful funny lately. I wasn't lonesome, still, there was something or somebody I wanted all the time. I didn't know what it was — I just felt a kind of longing for something. Then I met Red. He was just what I wanted. It's kind of strange, but when I'm around him I like to feel weak,

and act like a sort of poor little me.

ELSIE. God, you sure have it bad.

LIZ. Yes, I suppose I have. Maybe I ought to feel ashamed, but somehow I like it. And besides, there's one more thing I want.

ELSIE. What now?

LIZ. I want to have a baby.

ELSIE. Well, that's better than to have a baby and not want one. Take that from me kid, I know.

LIZ. Yes, you told me about that. I don't see how you could do it. I'm sure I couldn't give mine away if I had one.

ELSIE. If you never know a thing you'll never miss it. See? If you remember that it'll save you lots of trouble.

LIZ. Yes, I suppose that's partly true. Probably if I had never met Red I'd never have missed him. Still, I felt I needed something different when I met him, and he seemed to be it. Now, since I met him, I simply can't bear the thought of giving him up. I'd sooner lose my right arm, he means that much to me. He's

wild now, and drinks a lot, but he might settle down. At least, that's what I hope he'll do.

ELSIE. He'll settle down all right, if you have the strength to settle him. That's the kind of guy he is.

LIZ. Listen here, you're judging him by one bad experience. Ain't that the truth?

ELSIE. No, I'm not. But if I was judging him by the one you've probably heard about, it would be enough, wouldn't it? God, when I think how my dogs ached that night, I could crown the lousy cur.

LIZ. Now listen, the more you talk about him, the less I like you, see? He's my man. I picked him out, and I'm going to keep him.

ELSIE. I'm not going to like him any better by keeping still. I just hope he's as thoughtful of you as you are of him. I know I'd be damned sure of what a guy thought of me before I'd worry much over what somebody else said about him. Just between you and me, kid, does he think as much of you as you do of him?

LIZ. W — wh — y yes? I think he does.

ELSIE. You think he does? Don't you know?

LIZ. Why yes. I'm sure Red loves me. He would-

n't say all the nice things he's said to me if he didn't mean them.

ELSIE. You can't depend much on a man's line. You don't talk as if you were as sure as you might be. What's the catch, anyway?

LIZ. Well, there really isn't any.

ELSIE. Come on, I know different. You act as if you were half scared of something.

LIZ. I suppose I might as well come out with it. Honestly it isn't anything, though. I'm just kind of nervous over nothing, I guess. Well here goes! Maybe you don't know it, but Red's awful strict. Gee, he's terrible set in some ways. Red says to me one night, "From now on it's just you and me, baby. Get me? And if I ever hear of you being out with another guy you'll sure know something has happened." Well, since then I went out with Bill Myers over to the opening of Spike's new place. Gee, I couldn't help it. Bill's such a good scout, and he asked me to go before I'd got engaged to Red. I didn't tell Red because I didn't know how he'd feel about it.

ELSIE. Gee, if he ever finds out he'll sure make things hot for you, won't he?

LIZ. (*In terror*) You don't think he'll ever find out, do you? I'd die if he did. I believe I really would. He's my man and I've got to keep him. I couldn't help it. There was no way for me to get out of it. (*Slower*) God he can't find out. That wouldn't be fair. (*Turns to Elsie*) It wouldn't be right if I lost him, would it?

ELSIE. (*Looking at her watch*) No, I guess not. Say it's getting late. What time are you closing up?

LIZ. (*Looking at her watch*) Right away.

ELSIE. All right, let's go. (*She goes to the cash register and opens it*) Take in much today?

LIZ. (*Picking up a few odds and ends*) Not so much. Been a light day.

ELSIE. (*Holding up a new revolver*) Where did you get this, and why?

LIZ. The boss got it because there's been three holdups in town in the last three days. That would sure stop them if I was sure I knew how to use it.

ELSIE. (*Sighting at a spot on the wall*) Well, I didn't live in Chicago nineteen years for nothing.

LIZ *has disappeared back of the piano.* ELSIE *looks*

over the gun for a few moments and lays it back in the cash register.

ELSIE. Can I help?

LIZ. (*From behind the piano*) Sure. You can help me take the nickels out of the rattle-box.

ELSIE, *too, disappears behind the piano. The stage is empty for a few moments when a tall, powerfully-built man appears at the door. He steps inside quietly and lets the screen slam with a bang. His unsteady movements and his facial expression show at once that he is very drunk. At the sound of the door both women appear instantly.*

LIZ. (*Starting to come out in front of the counter. Timidly*) Hello, Red.

RED *stands eyeing* LIZ. *In spite of the extremely drunken expression that is on his face, there is a cruel, sinister look in his eyes.* ELSIE *stands with her arms akimbo, eyeing him defiantly.*

LIZ. What's the matter, Red? Can't you talk?

RED. You're damned right I can talk. And what's more I'm going to talk, and nobody can keep me from talking.

ELSIE. God, a regular victrola.

RED. Shut up, will you? Shut up!

LIZ. Aw, Red, what's the trouble?

RED. There's plenty of trouble. (*Waving his arms drunkenly*) Everything's the trouble.

LIZ *walks up to him and tries to take his arm. He wrenches himself loose viciously, knocking her down.*

RED. Get away will you? Give me more room. Plenty of room.

LIZ. (*Coming back, timidly*) Come on, Red, we're going home. Locking up right now.

RED. Like hell you are. I won't let you lock up, see? And then what will you do? Not a damned thing. (*Laughs hilariously*) No, not a damned thing.

LIZ. Please, Red, let's go home. You'll feel a lot better in the morning.

ELSIE. Aw, Liz, why don't you lock him up in here for the night? It would do him good.

RED. Huh? What's that you said? (*Roars*) Didn't I tell you once to shut up? (*He glares at her men-*

acingly, while LIZ *keeps tugging at his arm. He looks around and seems to discover for the first time that* LIZ *is trying to pull him along*)

LIZ. Red, for God's sake, please come on out of here. The boss might come around to see if everything is closed up all right. He'd be awful mad.

RED. (*Stupidly*) The boss? Oh sure, the boss. Hey, quit pushing will you? (*With a sweep of his hand and arm he throws her to the floor*) Now will you get away? (*Obviously,* LIZ *is hurt. She begins to sob while sitting on the floor*)

ELSIE. (*Coming over to* RED *belligerently*) Say you big bully, where's your manners? Who do you think you are, anyhow? Lay off that kid or I'll give you another black eye. See?

RED. Well, well. What do you think of that? I never heard so much wind out of a runt like you.

ELSIE. You heard me.

RED. Say, noisy, pipe down, will you? If she's going to be my wife I'll do with her as I damned please.

ELSIE. Well, you won't pull any of that rough stuff while I'm around.

RED. Oh, won't I? As if I had to ask you what I could do! Run along before I biff you one.

LIZ. Never mind, Elsie, I'm all right. Red, won't you please behave? What's come over you? You never acted this way before.

ELSIE. You didn't know him as well as I did, that's what the trouble is.

RED. Say little pretty-face, I'll speak to you about once more, and after that I'll set you on your ear. (*He turns to* LIZ) Well, I heard about your little game. Went to the dance with Bill Meyers the other night, eh? Thought you'd fool me, didn't you? Well you didn't.

LIZ. Honest to God, Red, I couldn't help it. I didn't say anything because I didn't think you'd care.

RED. Well, I don't care. Hell no! You've got to get a better line than that because it won't go down my throat.

LIZ. Honest, Red, I didn't mean a thing. You know —

RED. Now listen here. I said to lay off that line. Do you remember me saying once that "from now on

it's just you and me"?

LIZ. Yes — yes I do.

RED. Do you remember what you said then?

LIZ. Yes I do, Red.

RED. Do you remember me saying that you'd get hell if you didn't lay off the other guys for good?

LIZ. Yes . . . yes . . . I remember.

RED. (*The sweat is standing out on his forehead. His hands are clenched and his jaw set*) Well, get ready, because I'm going to give you hell right now.

LIZ. (*Falls to her knees and screams*) Red, for God's sake, please behave.

RED. I went out and got good and drunk so I could do this job up right. (*He strikes her full in the face and sends her sprawling. She remains on the floor and sobs. He starts to kick her until* ELSIE, *who has been watching the proceedings from behind the counter, rushes out with a frying-pan and hits him over the head. For an instant he is stunned. He recovers quickly and makes a vicious lunge at* ELSIE. *She is too quick for him and ducks around the down-stage end of the counter to the cash*

register. RED *is unsteady on his feet and barely reaches the corner of the counter before* ELSIE *grabs the gun and runs around the other end of the counter. She wheels in the center of the stage and faces* RED *who has turned to follow her*)

ELSIE. Come on, you big bully — let's see you fight now.

As RED *stops for a moment, baffled, she shoots him twice.* LIZ, *who has not yet had time to fully understand the gravity of the situation, screams as* RED *crumples to the floor.*

ELSIE. (*Dropping the gun on the floor beside the body of* RED) Well, that's that. Easier than I expected. Self-defense. Good alibi, that.

LIZ. (*Falling on the body of* RED) For God's sake, Red, speak, will you? I'm not to blame, Red. Honest to God I'm not. (*She pauses for a moment and then turns her head toward* ELSIE *who is leaning against the counter, powdering her nose. Finally with great calmness and self-control*) You did this. You killed my man. What did you have against him anyway?

ELSIE. Well, if you've got to know, I'll tell you. Annie Simpson was my best girl friend back in Chicago.

She starved to death trying to pay doctors to save her sick baby. What's that got to do with this? Well, (*Pointing to the body of Red*) that drunken pig was that kid's father. And he never paid Annie a red cent.

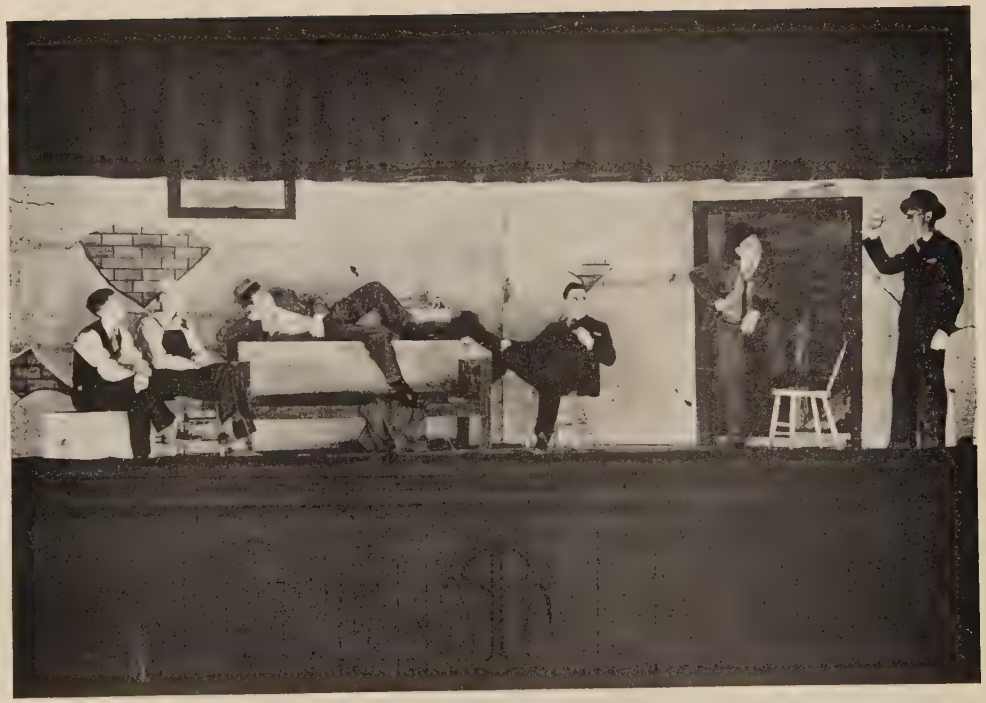
LIZ. (*On her feet in an instant, gun in hand*) That's a lie. Red wouldn't do a thing like that. You shot him to spite me, that's what you did. I told you to let him alone, and you said you would. (*Levels the gun on* ELSIE) Do you know what you've done? You've killed my man.

ELSIE. Go ahead, plug me if you want to. I'm not sorry I did it. I'd do it again if I had a chance. You're an innocent damn fool — that's the only reason I feel sorry for you. Shoot if it will make you feel any better.

LIZ. I'd ought to shoot you. I'd ought to tear you apart and feed you to the dogs. (*She turns and looks down at* RED'S *body*) But I can't. God, I can't. I guess I just haven't got the guts. (*She faces* ELSIE. *Her voice is calm and steady*) Well, goodbye kid. I'm sorry we broke up. Guess this is just my luck . . . always has been this way. Go on home now. I'm going to stay for a while. (ELSIE *turns slowly and walks to the door.* LIZ *kneels by the body of* RED.

She has the gun in her hand. She fingers it nervously as . . .) Red. . . I'm coming to you. (ELSIE *stands in the doorway, watching quietly*) I'll be with you as soon as I get my nerve up. I will, Red . . . honest I will. (*She sits looking at the gun as* ELSIE *quietly slips out, and . . .*)

Curtain



LOUIE. "If I tell may my eyeballs be pierced to the center with a three-edged blade . ."

THE JOINERS

by ARTHUR M. HINKLEY, *'29*

Awarded first place, Friday evening, March 15, 1929

JUDGES—*Miss Jessie Bonstelle*
Mr. Daniel L. Quirk, Jr.
Professor Chester Wallace

CAST

JOE ROBINSON	*Sidney Lochman*
JACOB JONES	*William Bainter*
JOHN SMITH	*Ben S. Washer*
THOMAS THOMPSON	*Sidney Shevitz*
OSCAR DECKER	*Joseph Pomeroy*
LOUIS MORAN	*Harry Russell*

THE *curtain rises upon the back room of Robinson's Plumbing Company. At the right is a workbench, fitted with a vise and littered with pipe-wrenches and lengths of pipe. Center is an overturned bath-tub and at the left is a box or chair. Other accouterments of a plumbing shop complete the furnishings. There is a door down left leading outside. The whole arrangement and mood is that of complete disorder and ugliness. It is drab and commonplace. It is a plumbing shop. The action probably takes place shortly after dinner.*

DISCOVERED: ROBINSON *is finishing a piece of pipe-fitting at the work bench. He is in over-alls.* JONES *enters from outside.*

ROBINSON. Sit down, Jake, I'll be with you in a minute. I gotta clean this place up a bit. (*Sweeps out shop*)

JONES. Funny how things get dirty, ain't it?

ROBINSON. Yeah, we don't do nuthin' but fit pipes and a little soldering out here but it gets awful dirty for some reason or other.

JONES. I just saw Jack and Tom up the street. They stopped to get some cigars before coming down. They was awful mysterious about what is going to happen down here.

ROBINSON. Yeah, they'll be here in a minute, I expect.

JONES. Say Joe, if it ain't being too curious, just what is going to happen. I had an awful time getting away from the wife tonight. You know, this is supposed to be one of my nights at home. None of my lodges meet on Wednesday so the wife usually makes me stay in.

ROBINSON. (*Puts up broom and takes off overalls*) Well, Jake, it's about the Owls. You remember how the four of us was talking about how things ain't exactly right with that club?

JONES. Yep, there is something wrong with that club.

ROBINSON. Well, I been thinking about that for quite a while and it don't strike me as this new set of officers is doing what they ought to. Of course, when we was in office it was different.

JONES. That's right. They ain't interpreting the constitution as they ought to.

ROBINSON. And the more I thought about it, the more I began to believe that there is something wrong with the way that club is organized.

JONES. You mean it ain't just the East Side crowd that is wrong.

ROBINSON. Well, look here. Owls was founded in 1906, wasn't they? And since then there has been twenty different clubs sprung up from fellows that thought the Owls was no good. Twenty—a—a—a—secessions of loyal members.

JONES. That's right. Twenty different offshoots.

ROBINSON. Now if there's that many fellows find fault with the club I maintain that there is something really wrong with the Owls at the bottom. Figuring like that, I don't exactly see why we should waste our time with a club that don't exactly satisfy us. What we want to do is to start a real fraternal organization that will be better.

JONES. Jeeze, a new club of our own. Everything just the way we want it. A constitution written by us and uniforms thought up by us. I gotta swell idea for a grip.

ROBINSON. That's the idea. Now look. We got us two and Jack and Tom. Between the four of us there is nine orders represented. Now with our own ideas and the experience of belonging to all those clubs, we ought to be able to start a really good club.

JONES. What we want is one that is mystic with lots of good side orders. Jeeze, I can get the wife to start an auxiliary too. Say, have you got any good ideas on what to found the club on—I mean, like the K. P.s are founded on the story of Damon and Pythias.

ROBINSON. No, I ain't thought much about that

but I wrote an oath that is a peach. When the others get here I'll read it.

JONES. I got a swell idea for a grip and listen, did you ever hear of those old English priests that offered human sacrifices? I can't think of their name but they would be a swell thing to pattern after. Think of the ritual that could be written about a human sacrifice.

SMITH *and* THOMPSON *knock and enter without waiting and ad lib salutations.*

ROBINSON. Come in fellows, Jake is all for the idea.

JONES. Yeah, this is great, I got some swell ideas. I always did want to start a club.

THOMPSON. Glad you like the idea. Have a cigar? (*Offers cigars to* JONES *and* ROBINSON)

ROBINSON. Thanks. (*Takes one*)

JONES. Thanks a lot. Here's a light, Joe.

SMITH. I just saw Oscar and Louie up the street. They may drop in.

ROBINSON. They're pretty good fellows — but they kind of think they're pretty smart.

SMITH. Yeah, they do. But they ain't bad eggs. I wonder if they would want to join our club.

THOMPSON. They'd be good men to have. They-'re well known.

JONES. Well, if they come in let's ask them.

THOMPSON. Sure, we might as well.

ROBINSON. Well, seeing as this is the first time any of us ever started a club, I don't exactly know where to begin.

SMITH. I think we ought to decide on the kind of a club it is going to be. Are we going to have an animal club or a mystic order like the Shriners?

THOMPSON. I got some swell ideas for an animal club like the Moose.

JONES. I want to show you fellows the grip I thought up. It goes like this — you put your — (*Demonstrates*)

ROBINSON. Say listen, I wrote part of the constitution last night. You know I think the oath of allegiance ought to be the first thing. You know loyalty to the order is the most important thing. We got to be loyal or we won't have a good club.

SMITH. Oh, we can get a good constitution somewhere easy. The most important thing is the kind of uniforms we are going to have. We want something that is really different. Something with a lot of color and plumes and swords. I think the Shriners' outfits are fine.

JONES. Listen, I was telling you about my grip. You put your —

THOMPSON. Now just a minute. We don't want a president. We want a monarch or a supreme seignor or a maharajah or a grand illuminator for the big office. I think we ought to decide on what we are going to be — knights or monks or dervishes or ogres or —

SMITH. I've just been thinking about the name for the club. There are a lot of things it ought to be — for instance, imperial and illustrious and royal and mystic and exalted and ancient and secret. I think the best name I know of now is the Imperial and Illustrious Order of the Mystic and Exalted Cross. But we can do even better than that.

ROBINSON. Now I was telling you about this oath I wrote. That's a good starting place.

A knock is heard from outside.

ROBINSON. Probably it's Louie and Oscar — but if it ain't we gotta keep this a secret. See —

JONES. Jeeze, I hope it ain't my wife.

ROBINSON. Come in. (*To Joiners*) Remember we're talking politics.

LOUIE *and* OSCAR *enter.*

ROBINSON. (*Midst ad libbing of salutations*) Oh, it's Oscar and Louie. It's all right, let's go on.

OSCAR. What's the occasion for the big meeting? Going to elect Jake mayor or something?

ROBINSON. No Oscar. We are forming a new fraternal order. A real mystic organization with swell initiations and uniforms.

OSCAR. Starting another organization? Well, I'll be damned.

SMITH. Yes, and I am very happy to offer you and Louie the privilege of being charter members in what will be the greatest fraternal order in the world.

OSCAR. Aw bologney. I'm an Elk now — that's

enough for any sane man to stand. What do you want another club for?

JONES. You'd better join — it's going to be great. How about you Louie?

LOUIE. No thanks!

OSCAR. This is the damndest thing I ever see. There isn't one of you that doesn't have five different watch charms or lapel buttons now and still you want more. What's the matter — sore at 'em all? Can't you all be president?

THOMPSON. No, we ain't sore. We just ain't quite satisfied with 'em. Nothing really wrong. We just think we can start one with all the good points of all of them and none of their bad ones.

LOUIE. Pretty big job for you, isn't it?

ROBINSON. No, we're just as smart as anybody else that ever started a club, so why shouldn't we?

OSCAR. Well what bothers me is, why belong to all these damn clubs? What good are they? Why in hell go to all the trouble?

SMITH. Well, they make a lot of friends for you and you get a lot of customers and —well, it's good for

business.

JONES. Sure, and think of the group insurance plans and the benefit of having a club physician. It's pretty nice to have expert medical care for the whole family for about a dollar a week. We're going to have that in our new club — like the Moose.

OSCAR. Yeah, maybe that's so.

THOMPSON. Being a Mason helped my sales a lot.

OSCAR. Yeah, but still that don't show why you should dress up like a damn fool every time you meet. Hell's bells, you don't have to put on red pants and wear a sword to sell a guy a new Ford.

LOUIE. Padded pants might help.

THOMPSON. Well, I boosted my sales by being a member.

OSCAR. I'll grant you that. It does help sales and you get the benefit of group insurance. But it sure don't prove why you should address a guy as "Most Holy and Exalted Potentate" when you know damn well he is just a plumber.

ROBINSON. Well —

OSCAR. Listen you great fraternal birds. Tell me why you go down to the Owls or Elks every Tuesday evening and put on a funny suit. Then you go up to a door and knock three times. Somebody opens a peep hole and yips "Who knocks, a friend or enemy?" Then you curl up your little toe, stick your thumb in your ear and, with your eyes shut, say "A friend". Now why in hell go through all this when you've been buying groceries from this gent behind the door for ten years. It's plain, damn foolishness.

LOUIE. Hell, it's harmless — let 'em do it.

OSCAR. But what good is it? Why should you learn a lot about the customs of ancient Tibetans to be a successful Ford dealer? Why should you spend an evening in a pair of epaulettes and a plume once a week?

LOUIE. Oh, they ain't supposed to tell! You know what the Shriner says — (*With great mock seriousness*) "If I tell may my eyeballs be pierced to the center with a three-edged blade, my feet be flayed and I be forced to walk the hot sands upon the sterile shores of the Red Sea until the flaming sun shall strike me with living plague, and may Allah, the god of Arab, Moslem, and Mohammedan, the god of my fathers, support me to

the fulfillment of the same. Amen — amen — amen." Bologney.

SMITH. Well, what would be the sense of just meeting and doing nothing but play pinochle? It wouldn't be no fun.

LOUIE. The boy has an idea.

OSCAR. Wadda you mean?

LOUIE. He says it wouldn't be no fun unless they dressed up.

OSCAR. You mean it is fun to get all tangled up in a spear and have a big plume tickling the back of your neck, and a pair of pants you can't sit down in?

LOUIE. Wasn't you ever a kid? Didn't you ever play Indian and wish you lived in a time when you could shoot bears and buffalos in your back yard?

OSCAR. What's all that got to do with Shriners and Woodmen?

LOUIE. Ain't you got no imagination at all? They-'re doing the same thing as when you took a turkey feather and a blanket and thought you was Chief Big Moon.

OSCAR. Oh, I get you now. It makes 'em forget they're bookkeepers and they think they're Sir Launcelot. — I'd rather play pool. It's not so hard on the brain.

LOUIE. I'll give you ten and beat you on the string.

OSCAR. Sold. Good-bye Sitting Bull — don't scalp yourself.

LOUIE *and* OSCAR *exit.*

THOMPSON. Say, were those guys trying to kid us. If I was sure they were, I'd knock them out of their shoes.

ROBINSON. (*Deliberating*) No, I don't think so. They simply don't like lodges like we do. No, they weren't kidding us.

SMITH. I don't care whether they were or not. I came here to form a new club and I'm going to do it.

JONES. Sure, that's the idea. Where were we when they came in?

ROBINSON. I was just going to read my oath of allegiance that we are going to use. Now listen, you bring the person to be initiated into the room blindfolded. You stand him before the altar — we'll have

an altar no matter what kind of a club we have — and raise the blindfold. We are all standing around the room in our robes or uniforms. Back of the altar the head man stands. The person to be initiated repeats after him this: "Be it known by these most sacred and mystic surroundings, and in the presence of these most honorable and exalted men, that I" — he says his name — "do hereby promise faithfully and agree solemnly to uphold the precepts and orders of this organization. I do further swear never to reveal the secrets which shall be imparted to me. And if I fail may I forever be ostracized from the company of mankind and may my brothers shun me and may I die alone and friendless. Amen." See how that oath emphasizes the fraternal part of the club. Makes them realize how important friends are. I think that is a very good oath.

SMITH. I don't exactly like that. Now the Shriners have one that is a lot stronger. I don't think that has enough drive and pep in it. It is too soft.

JONES. I like it. I think it is good and it will go with my grip perfectly. Now look at this grip. It is done with the right hand. You shake hands with the little fingers interlocked. The middle fingers curled up inside and the index and third fingers wrapped around the other's wrists. There's a good grip.

Demonstrates with SMITH *and* THOMPSON.

THOMPSON. That grip ain't any good. There's nothing extraordinary about it. Anybody could think up a grip like that and besides it's too evident. You can get it all by just watching it once.

JONES. Now listen a minute will you. I ain't told you all about it. Think of the significance of it. Now, there, that is the way your hand will be. See, four points symbolizing the four sides of our life which the club will emphasize — spiritual, physical, intellectual, and service. And then the curled up middle finger symbolizes the secrecy of the order. Ain't that fine?

THOMPSON. Yeah, perhaps, but I don't see how it will fit in with my idea for an animal club. That ain't a grip for an animal club, that's a grip for some church organization like the Epworth League.

SMITH. That animal club is a good idea. I been thinking about it all the time. They are the most popular kind now. We want to be a popular kind if we want to be successful.

JONES. Now this idea of mine about those English priests is a lot better. What we want is something really mystic like them. Think of the swell robes and

ceremonies that could be thought up.

ROBINSON. Now I'm for the priest idea. I'm an Elk and Beaver now. I've had enough animals. I want something different. I think my oath would be good with these priests.

THOMPSON. Who wants to be a priest? I'm a prophet and a saint now. I want to be in one of these animal clubs. Now why don't you two guys get some sense into your heads and agree that we got the best idea. Now let's get together. No sense trying to bust up the club before it gets started.

JONES. Who's trying to bust up the club? I'm just trying to tell you guys that nobody wants to join these animal clubs any more. Everybody is an Elk or a Moose or some kind of an animal. What we want is something really mystic like my idea about those English priests.

SMITH. What's old English priests got to do with us now? And that grip you so cleverly thought up is no damn good. Just a combination of the — well, it's like some others. Now what we want is —

ROBINSON. That's a good grip and I'm for this priests idea. Looks like some swell robes and initia-

tions can be thought up on that idea.

JONES. What's the matter with my grip? If we have a grip in this club it's going to be my grip.

SMITH. Aw, shut up. Now listen, don't get so high and mighty or I'll leave your damn club. What we want is an animal club. Bears . . . that's it . . . Bears. The great animal that roamed the forests of early America. That's what this club is going to be. Bears.

ROBINSON. Bears? Who wants to be a bear — stinkin' animals that can't move fast enough to stop quick. Now this priests idea has got class. And my oath is just right for priests.

THOMPSON. (*He is a bit apart from the group and the light finally dawns upon him*) Bears! By God that's what we want. You take your damn priests and oath and grip. I'm for Bears.

ROBINSON. Say, who started this movement for a new club and who wrote the oath? I suggested this and I'm going to have something to say about it. My club is going to be priests. And we're going to use my oath and Jone's grip. That's what this club is going to be.

SMITH. Well then, you can take your damn priests and grip and oath and go to hell with them. I'm going to start the Bears.

THOMPSON. And we can use my grip. And I can write a swell constitution. I know five pretty good ones now.

JONES. We ain't asking you to be priests. We can find plenty of intelligent men to be priests with us and use my grip.

SMITH. Well, don't worry. We ain't going to be priests. We're going to be Bears and make your priests look like the second raters that they are. Come on, Tom. Let's go start a real club and let these damn fools have their freakish ideas.

THOMPSON. Sure, we're going to have a real club.

JONES. Aw, go jump in the lake.

SMITH *and* THOMPSON *exit.*

ROBINSON. Jake — we're going to be real priests, ain't we? Even if they did desert us.

JONES. You're damn right. Now we can have a real club with my grip.

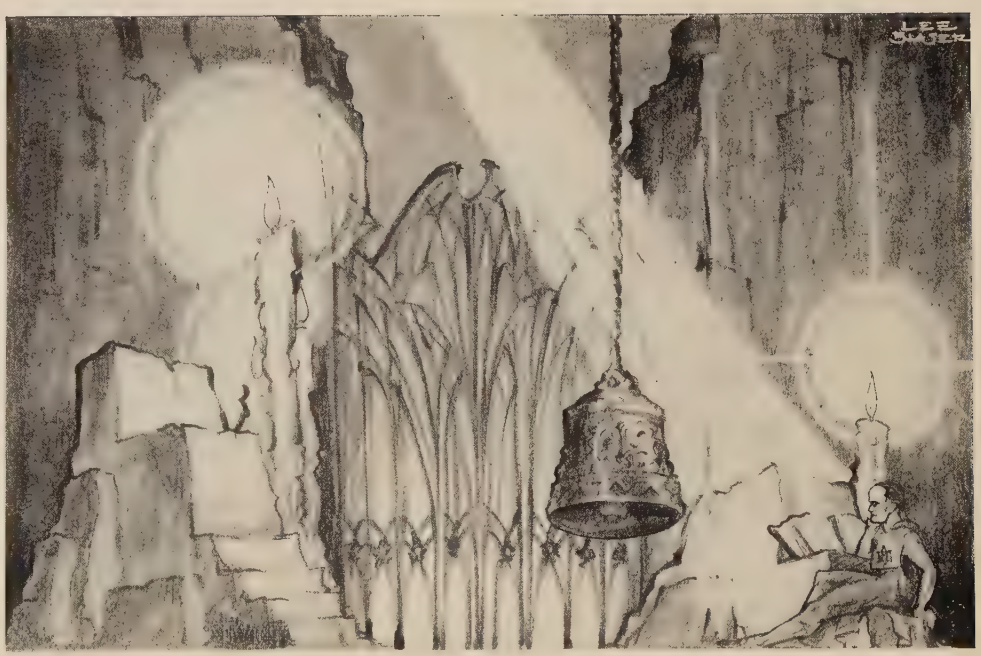
ROBINSON. And my oath.

They execute the grip and repeat the following —

"And if I fail may I forever be ostracized from the company of mankind and may my brothers shun me and may I die alone and friendless. Amen."

Curtain

Acknowledgement of a suggestion for the theme of "The Joiners" is made to "Sweet Land of Secrecy," by Mr. Charles Merz, in HARPER'S MAGAZINE, *February, 1927.*



Design by Lee E. Blaser, '32, for the marionette stage in *Puppet.*

PUPPET

A Play in One Act and Two Scenes

by HELEN ELISE ADLER, *'30*

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

HELEN HAY. *A marionetteer who writes her own plays, makes her own dolls, and does her own manipulating in conjunction with —*

PETER BREW. *Who is also in this marionette-theater world.*

BIG-FELLOW. *The marionette that Peter Brew is making throughout the first scene.*

PINOCCHIO.

MARIONETTES. *Many of the dolls that make up the "Company".*

JOHN. *A boy-of-odd-jobs.*

SCENE ONE

HELEN HAY'S *and* PETER BREW'S *workroom, at early morning.*

As there should be in every sort of studio, there are here many windows. They range straight across the back of the room, and there is even one on the left wall, rear. It is really unimportant what they "look out on." We are much more interested in the things that happen inside the room itself, and the exterior would only be one more thing with which to become orientated.

Well rear, rather in the center of the stage, is

PETER'S *long, littered work table. On it stand not only the familiar carpenter's tools that exist to a certain extent in every household, but also the implements of the puppet trade. The extreme right end of this table is separated from the rest by a flimsy cardboard partition, and this one section is meticulously neat and systematized. On it are the brushes and paints that* HELEN *uses to create on the faces of the dolls those expressions that determine their pathos or their humor. As a matter of fact, the entire right side of the room might be said to belong to* HELEN. *There are all the articles that constitute her kingdom. In the rear right corner is her great easy chair, with her sewing-table on the right and her lamp on the left. Against the right wall, on a line with the lamp, is a small ironing board, and back of her chair is a door leading off stage. Well to the front, against this same wall, stands the marionette stage itself. It is on wheels, and may be easily rolled from one spot to another.*

The left side of the room, as I remarked, belongs to PETER. *Between the side window and the back wall stands an axe-grinder.* PETER *has a lounge; an ordinary chair is not enough for the man. He must stretch out his long legs when he is bored, and be able to have at hand his favorite pipe and his largest ash tray. To this effect, a table*

stands behind the couch at the end that is nearest the center of the stage. Back from the footlights about nine feet, against the left wall, stands a cupboard, filled with all the little things that two such versatile folk could need in their various arts. In the center of the stage, a trifle to the right, is a large clothes-basket filled at all times with trash.

Approximately three yards back from the foot-lights is a rather peculiar contrivance. Here, on each side of the stage, an iron pole has been erected to carry the curtain which can be drawn into position to hide the entire studio when the marionette stage is wheeled to the center of the stage for a public performance. When these curtains are in use, the one on the left reaches to the left end of the puppet theater, and the one on the right to the right end of the same. Thus it is obvious that the studio is joined to a larger room in which the audience of the puppet plays is seated — even as you, the audience of the main play, are seated where you are.

Left on the stage, however, is PINOCCHIO'S *log — by far the most important thing on the set. It is perhaps six feet long and four feet in circumference. Along the top of the log is stretched, face down, a painted marionette — a lanky, many-jointed, homely*

doll who is immediately to be recognized as PINOCCHIO. *His arms drop to each side of the log, his heels are together, and his cheek is pressed to the log in such a way that his face is towards the audience. In view of the fact that he is continually talking throughout the play, the dialogue must be so arranged that his most important remarks fall when the other characters are silent.*

With the rising curtain, HELEN HAY, *seated in "her" arm chair, is sewing a pair of breeches for the naked* PINOCCHIO, *and* PETER BREW *is sharpening a large axe.*

HELEN *is a not uncommon looking woman; we would never turn around to look at her in the street. Yet she is certainly a fine person, and her sense of values asserts itself in a quiet way in everything she does. She is not incapable of a delicate sort of sarcasm, and one feels that her rather smiling, quiet feeling of superiority over such men as* PETER, *is entirely justified.*

PETER *himself is not a bad sort, however. It is true that he is blunt, impatient, foolishly sarcastic in a flippant, antagonizing sort of way, but he really means nothing by it. If anyone were to tell him that he was a product of the spirit of his age, he would be extremely*

hurt — unless it were done in just the right way. If this were the case, however, it is perfectly obvious that he would understand any analysis of his short-comings and do his best to eliminate his false qualities. It is not probable that anyone has gone to this trouble with PETER, *though. For certainly he is impatient, brusque, biting. His motions are jerky, his speech is jerky, his temper is jerky. It is all* HELEN *can do to maintain her own calm.*

PETER. Did Bruce tell you what kind of wood the log is?

PINOCCHIO. (*Who has been running his arms along the sides of the log*) What kind of wood *are* you, Log? . . . .

HELEN. No, but he ought to know what to send us. He's supplied our wood long enough to!

PETER. Not that that makes any difference. Last time I had to send it back three times. (PINOCCHIO: "How he does go on!") You ought to be more particular. Next thing you know —

HELEN. (*She always interrupts!*) Oh Peter! The wood's probably perfectly all right! Look before you growl! (*She gets up* — PINOCCHIO: "She's

coming this way" — *and walks over to the log to measure the length that* PINOCCHIO'S *breeches ought to be*)

PINOCCHIO. Brrr! Tickle, tickle, tickle! (*While* HELEN *returns to her chair,* PINOCCHIO *goes on* — "I have all I can do to keep from rubbing my paint off!")

HELEN. Don't you think you made Pinocchio's legs a little longer than Mister Collodi meant them to be, Peter?

PINOCCHIO. I'd noticed that about my legs! (*He cranes his neck to try to see them*)

PETER. I—

HELEN. And then you forgot that his nose was supposed to be pretty long.

PINOCCHIO. (*Feeling vaguely for his nose about a foot from where it ends*) Where *is* my nose? . . . .

PETER. You know perfectly well I only did him to pass away time till this log for Big-Fellow came. (PINOCCHIO: "I like that!") He isn't finished yet. We aren't using him for ages, anyway. So what difference does it make?

HELEN. It's just about his breeches. (*Helen answers meekly, and* PINOCCHIO *is heard above her*: "*You're* the important member of this cast!" — *he pats the log fondly*)

PETER. The breeches can wait.

PINOCCHIO *is impolite; he chatters right through* PETER: "I wonder what they're making you. And my advice to you is — be born as you please, and not as is pleased for you." *The latter remark is triumphantly addressed to* LOG *in particular, while a small silence ensues and* HELEN *walks to her end of the table to start mixing paints.*

HELEN. (*Very cautiously*) This play is going to mean make or break, Peter.

PETER. I've been wondering if you felt that, too.

PINOCCHIO. . . . . Though I don't know why I should be advising you. . . .

PETER. How do you think it'll go?

HELEN. Well, you know how it is with fantasy — (PINOCCHIO, *simultaneously* — "My poor father always said" . . . .) Either you get the audience that can appreciate it and you're made, or . . . . (*she*

gestures expressively, and PINOCCHIO: . . . "never to speak to those I didn't know.") . . . you get the audience that wants to be shown how it lives and you're hoo-dooed. The critics —

PETER. Oh, damn the critics! (*He is just standing there gesticulating with the axe he has sharpened*)

PINOCCHIO. What *is* your name? . . . .

HELEN. Browning got that in a long time before you did, Peter! But do get on with Big-Fellow!

PINOCCHIO. (*Laughing*) Oh! *There's* a woman who says things at the right time.

HELEN. Ten days' practice on a new play isn't any too much.

PINOCCHIO. How stupid! Some of us only *live* ten days!

PETER. (*He has nonchalantly, even unnoticingly, swept* PINOCCHIO *off the log.* PINOCCHIO: "Well, I like that!") Awfully hard wood.

HELEN. That's why Bruce stripped off the bark for you. (PINOCCHIO: "They just knock me around as though I were" . . .) How tall are you making

Big-Fellow? (PINOCCHIO . . . . "nobody at all! . . . . I'm Pinocchio!)

PETER. Three feet.

Little business of bowing from the waist down on PINOCCHIO'S *part, who goes right on chattering, counting his fingers, inspecting his toes, investigating his body in the following manner straight through the next three speeches.* PINOCCHIO: "I have one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, *ten* fingers!" — *Looks at his toes. Great surprise!* — "Oh! all my toes are one toe! No toes! No toes! No toes!" — *Wailingly* — "How can a puppet be a man with no toes?" — *A breath-taking thought comes to him.* — "They left something else off! The *must* have left something else off!" — *He starts investigating* — "Legs here." — *Chuckles.* — "Too much legs! Knees. Body. Body? That's not the word!" — *Thinks a minute* — "Well, body. Hands. Arms. Neck. Chin. Mouth-with-smile. Cheeks. Nose." —*Searching frantically where the end of his nose ought to be.* —"Nose? Nose? Nose? Oh!" — *Wail.* — "Well, eye." — *Touching his right eye with his left hand.* —"Eye." — *Touching his left eye with his right hand.* —"Roof." *Touching his forehead.* —"Hair." —*Running his hand over his painted head.* — "Hair? Hair? Hair? Oh!"

— *Wail.* —"My hair! My hair!"

PETER. But I'm not bothering with his body till his face is finished. Where's the model you did?

HELEN. Cupboard. (*She has a mouthful of pins*)

PETER *takes a model for* BIG-FELLOW'S *head from the top shelf of the cupboard, and stands it on the edge of the table so that it faces the audience. It is a harsh face, filled with authority and Power. A face that fits a ruler and a tyrant. A face that belongs to one who will be capable of creating misery and change. It has thin, hard lips, large and staring eyes, and a protruding chin.*

PETER. (*Chopping off a block of wood from the log*) What's going to happen if we don't put this across?

HELEN. I guess it'll just show that we're two perfectly ordinary people who belong in offices and not in the theatre, Peter.

PINOCCHIO. (*Starts. He has heard the end of the last speech*) Office? What's "office"?

PETER. Offices are ghastly. But then, neither of us is going to be forced back to an office. This play is

going to go over. We're being well advertised, and I think we can count on our audience.

HELEN. (*She has gotten up to look over* PETER'S *shoulder at what he has done so far with* BIG-FELLOW. PINOCCHIO *looks around curiously*) Be careful with Big-Fellow, Peter. Strong face, you know.

PETER. He'd ruin the play if he weren't just right.

PINOCCHIO. *I* think sometimes things act the way *they* think is right! *I* do!

HELEN. (*Having studied the head —*) Isn't his forehead a bit too narrow?

PINOCCHIO. (*Cranes and cranes to see the block. Very proudly —*) *That's* my old friend.

PETER. (*Holding the block at arm's length. The top of the head is completed, and the eyes are taking shape*) I don't know. I didn't seem to be able to do just what I wanted to with it. This wood is something awful.

PINOCCHIO. It isn't the wood! It isn't the wood! *He's* hard! I told him things! (*He flaps around*)

PETER. The knife'll hardly cut the stuff.

PINOCCHIO. I told Pinocchio's friend what to do!

HELEN. Peter! (PINOCCHIO *stops talking and moving, and listens to* HELEN) That eye looks almost kindly!

PINOCCHIO. Oh! He's going to be kindly!

PETER. For God's sake, wait till they're both there!

PINOCCHIO. Pinocchio's going to have a kind friend!

PETER. How can you tell from one eye? (HELEN *goes back to her end of the table in an obviously quiet and dignified way.* PINOCCHIO *has clapped his hands to his ears; his jaw has dropped*) Did you ever get around to fixing that word we didn't like?

HELEN. What word?

PETER. "*Fluff.*" (PINOCCHIO: "What's 'Fluff'?") It doesn't fit. (PINOCCHIO: Something to eat?") It isn't — (PINOCCHIO: "Something to drink?")

HELEN. I know. But after all — (PINOCCHIO: "*I'd* like Fluff!") I think you might do a little think-

ing on the subject yourself. (PINOCCHIO: "Think!" —*He grasps his head, and rocks back and forth, pretending to think*)

PETER. That was your word.

PINOCCHIO. Oh! It's a word! My! (*Sadly*)

HELEN. Well, — (PINOCCHIO: "I don't like words.") I cant' find—(PINOCCHIO: "Words are" —) a better one. So I guess the rest — (PINOCCHIO: — *Brightly* — "nothing!") — is up to Mr. Brew. (PINOCCHIO: *Laughs*)

PETER. (*Rather under his breath*) I guess the nose won't matter so much.

PINOCCHIO. Nose?! Nose?! Where *is* . . . . (*he feels for his nose*)

HELEN. What?

PINOCCHIO. Can't find it! (*He holds his arms wide apart, and bows his head*)

PETER. Oh, nothing!

PINOCCHIO. Oh! (*Indignantly*) He thinks it's nothing! . . .

HELEN. Let me see that doll.

PINOCCHIO. That's why it's not there! . . . .

PETER. Now, don't get excited.

PINOCCHIO. Wretch! Rascal! Blackguard! . .

PETER. (*Holding up head*) His strength is in his mouth and chin, where it belongs. (PINOCCHIO *absently runs his fingers over his mouth and chin, and finding things satisfactory there, nods seriously*)

PINOCCHIO. My poor father always *told* me . . . . . (*He trails off despondently*)

HELEN. (*After a little, ominous silence*) Peter, that doll isn't coming out right. (HELEN'S *speech startles* PINOCCHIO. *He listens intently*)

PETER. It isn't painted yet.

PINOCCHIO. (*With great conviction*) Paint isn't *really* your face!

HELEN. (*She is getting angry, because she is worried*) That isn't going to make all that difference, and you know it.

PINOCCHIO. Don't cover his face! . . . .

PETER. I tell you his strength is in his chin!

PINOCCHIO. I want to see! I want to see! . . . .

HELEN. It'll have to be a mighty strong chin.

PINOCCHIO. He's my friend! He doesn't want to be strong! Why should they make him strong? And anyway, (*conclusively*) he isn't *going* to be strong!

There is another deep silence. PINOCCHIO *is proud of his logic. He smirks and bows, silently.* PETER *is breathing very hard, and after a minute or so of tenseness, he gives the sort of half-groan, half-grunt, that is impossible to put on paper.*

HELEN. What's the trouble?

PETER. My knife slipped. I just can't make him what I want. His mouth has a sort of smile.

PINOCCHIO. He has a smile! (*Feels his mouth*) Like mine! (*So pleased!*)

HELEN. Perhaps I can paint it out. (PINOCCHIO, *looking horror-struck*—"Oh no! Oh, no! Oh, no!") Finish the chin strong, and it'll be all right.

PETER *squares his shoulders and sits up straight. He evidently thinks that the rest will come out all right.*

PINOCCHIO. It isn't fair! She says she'll paint it out! It isn't fair! He wants a smile, and she wants to paint a cry! Oh, no! Don't! Please don't — (*He holds out his arms to Helen*) — Please! Please! Please! Please! Please! — (*He chatters all his "pleases" as fast as his jaw can work*)

PETER. Well . . . . (*Then, quite suddenly, the knife slips again, and a large chip of wood flies to the floor*)

PETER. (*Holding the head at arm's length above his own head, and stamping to his feet*) Good God! Another chip! *Now* he has a dimple — (*He flings* BIG-FELLOW *into the clothes-basket with all his strength*) — in his chin!

As PETER *rises to his feet,* PINOCCHIO *staggers uncertainly up, too — lifted, perhaps, by the upward fling of his arms over his head. He teeters for a moment on his heels, and then, with a raucous scream of laughter, collapses into the footlights as*

Curtain

Scene Two

THE *same; some time later.* PINOCCHIO *is lying on the floor in practically the same position as he was in the beginning of the last scene.* HELEN *and* PETER *are getting through all the preliminaries necessary to the last practice of their play.* BIG-FELLOW *has been completed, and as the curtain rises,* PETER *is tying him to his fingers.* HELEN *is already dangling on her hands the massed group of marionettes that it will be her job to manipulate. This is to be the dress rehearsal of their all-important play.*

HELEN. Better call John to come push the stage in place, Peter.

PETER. Ready? (*Calling*) John! — (PINOCCHIO: "I wish I could get up. I'm tired of this lying-down.") I do hope I can manage Big-Fellow better this trip. (PINOCCHIO: "I want to get up." — *He flops his arms around and tries to lift himself with his legs*) Last few times his joints seemed so loose that they actually made him slump. Imagine a Power slumping!

PINOCCHIO. My stomach is tired of being lain on. . . .

HELEN. How's your voice today?

PINOCCHIO. I want to get off it. . . . .

PETER. Still feeble. What a rotten piece of luck!

PINOCCHIO. My father always *said* my stomach would outdo me! . . . .

HELEN. I hope it isn't as feeble as it was last time we practiced.

PINOCCHIO. (*Chattering through the next few speeches*) I want to get up! I want to get up! I want to get up! Why doesn't some one pull me up? (*He stops to listen to Helen's next speech*)

HELEN. The combination of Big-Fellow's slump and that womanly tone of voice pretty nearly killed the play.

PINOCCHIO. Kills? What's "kills"? I want to . . . . (*Meanwhile* JOHN, *the boy-of-odd-jobs, has come in and shoved the marionette stage to the center of the stage, as he does so, kicking* PINOCCHIO, *who flops to a sitting position*) Ah! (*He stretches and yawns*) I wouldn't be lying down for *anything!*

PETER. Pull the curtains, John, side and top!

As JOHN *follows instructions,* PETER *and* HELEN *climb to their positions on the ladders behind the stage, and are ready to begin the play.*

PINOCCHIO. Where are they going? (*He has seen* PETER *and* HELEN *climb their ladders*) Oh! He's got Big-Fellow! (*Proudly* —) Big-Fellow's my friend. (*Curiously* —) I wonder what they're going to do with him? (*The curtain obscuring the studio has been drawn in such a way that* PINOCCHIO *is in front on the floor craning his neck to see* —) Oh! They're going to do the play!

PETER. (*From behind the curtain.*) Ready Helen!

PINOCCHIO. Now I can see the play!

HELEN. *Right!*

PINOCCHIO *clasps his hands, and after a moment's silence, the puppet-stage parts its curtain on . . . .*

GOSSAMER

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

HEVIHAND. *Big-Fellow.*

SOULSPINNERS. *Marionettes of Helen Hay's and Peter Brew's marionette troupe.*

SCENE: *Cold, grey walls of rock, perched on a ledge on the heights of the infinite, form the space you see before you. A room is thus achieved — low, and oval, and dim. It is lit with many very tall, very heavy*

candles, grouped at the left. The latter are fastened to the floor and walls by means of their own tallow, and through the play they drip tremendously. The back of the stage is a symphony of simple beauty. Through a gate of twisted wrought-iron and bronze, we see the sky. All deep, deep blue, it is, and verging on the purple of a sky in a twilight of Winter — mystic, quiet, significant. And it is vivid. Behind the gate the ledge drops down to Earth.

To the right is a huge rock, flat topped, to serve HEV-HAND *as a desk. On it a candle burns, and a great book lies open in a spot of light. At the end of the rock that is nearest the audience, a natural depression in the stone forms the seat in which* HEVIHAND *is sitting as the curtain rises. To the extreme left of the stage, in a position corresponding to that of the table-rock, is a huge pile of unhewn stones. They have fallen together here, and by some chance have taken the form of a vast, rough throne.*

Half way back on the set, a trifle to the right of the center, hangs a massive bell. It is fixed to the roof by a heavy, unpretentious cord, and its graceful bottom hangs level with HEVIHAND'S *ears. It is dark, green, and bronze, and ornate with a convincing dignity.* HEVIHAND *is tall and heavy and determined. He*

domineers, yet he domineers for the final good of the world. He is dressed in an indefinite robe of burnished gold — gleaming and strong. He is a third again as tall as the SOULSPINNERS.

SOULSPINNERS! *They are slight and lovely and dim! They are dressed in spider-web grey, and their creative power is one of song and smiles. They have the beauty of great emotion, and the sorrow of broken dreams. There are many of them, but they mass, and are one.*

HEVIHAND *is seated in the hole in the table-rock, half turned to the audience. One sees the left side of his face. His clumsy hands turn the pages of the "Great Book" on the rock. The candles flicker and drip.*

PINOCCHIO. There he is! There he is! (*He becomes rapt in the play*)

HEVIHAND. (*Rumpling the pages of the great book; reading* —) "And the stuff of life is a gossamer fluff that riseth like a tide." Bah! I shall be a wind that tears the fluff in parts — to make of Life a firmer thing of pulp and thread. I shall make hempen the silken souls of men. (*He strikes his table, and rises to*

his feet — carried away by the constructive nature of his thought. In his hand he holds a large, nondescript stick that lay, once, on the rock near the candle. Wheeling around, taking one long stride, he strikes the bell that calls the SOULSPINNER'S. *The twisted gate swings open as the dainty creatures sway silently into the room. They are an indiscriminate mass — shoving the gate inward to admit them*) You have made more Souls? (*Infinite scorn is woven into the word on his lips, as he takes a step toward the* SOULSPINNERS *who have shoved back in the left rear corner*)

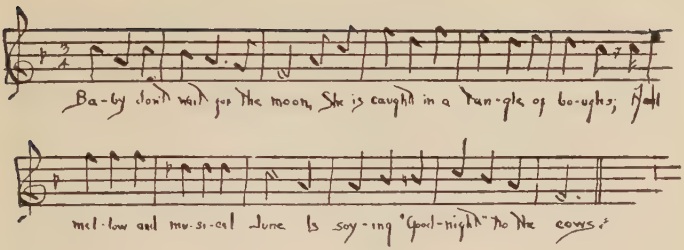
HELEN. Can't you . . . (PINOCCHIO — *turning brusquely to Helen*: "You keep out of his play!") . . . make that more *scornful,* Peter? (PETER *repeats; useless!*)

SOULSPINNERS. More souls! (*The* SOULSPINNERS *move rhythmically*)

HEVIHAND. And how did you make them?

SOULSPINNERS. As before.

The rhythm affects PINOCCHIO, *and he starts swaying back and forth, singing softly Pierrot's song*:



"Baby, don't wait for the moon,
She is caught in a tangle of boughs;
And mellow and musical June
Is saying "good-night" to the cows.

Baby, don't wait for the moon,
She will put out her tongue and grimace;
And mellow and musical June
Is pinning the stars in their place.

Baby, don't wait for the moon,
She has scratched her white chin on the gorse;
And mellow and musical June
Is bringing the cuckoo remorse.

Baby, don't wait for the moon,
She is drawing the sea in her net;
And mellow and musical June
Is teaching the moon to forget.

Baby, don't wait for the moon,
The stairs of the sky are so steep;
And mellow and musical June
Is waiting to kiss you to sleep."

This he repeats over and over throughout GOSSAMER, *except where lines or silences are indicated for him below.*

HEVIHAND. As before! (*His voice is the sound of the bong of the bell as it strikes the heavy sides; his hands are raised in scorn and despair*) And how is "as before"?

SOULSPINNERS. "The stuff of life is a gossamer fluff that riseth like a tide."

PETER. I don't like that word! (PINOCCHIO: "*Will* you keep out of his play?"—HELEN *goes calmly on . . . .*)

SOULSPINNERS. (*Their voice is the sound of the beat of the bell as it tarries in the room*) And the fluff shall rise on a wind of Grace that beareth Beauty's form. And Beauty shall mean . . . . . .

HEVIHAND. (PINOCCHIO *gasps with pleasure*) Enough! (*Sadly*) Life shall not be the grace

of fluff, nor the beauty of flowing waves. (HEVIHAND *steps to the bell*) Life shall be . . . . (*he strikes the bell; the* SOULSPINNERS *fall back, crowding each other and making a mass; for an instant their bodies become less graceful. And* HEVIHAND *crushes them all*) . . . . a Strength of cloven rock and a Grace of supple steel. (*But he emphasizes "Grace" instead of "Strength"*)

The SOULSPINNERS *will never be able to adapt themselves to steel and stone. Consternation. They whisper and swing about — the very essence of the ethereal. Their mass breaks — to become a grouping of individuals.*

SOULSPINNER. How should Life be hard?

SOULSPINNER. How should Life be stone?

SOULSPINNER. How should Life be cold?

SOULSPINNER. How should Life be grey?

SOULSPINNER. How should Life be steel?

SOULSPINNER. How should Life be sharp?

SOULSPINNERS. Immutable Life? Is plastic Life to bear the shape of stone? Are solid things to

take the place of haze? Is Life to have no part in shaping Life? Is rigidness to drive away the charm of indecision?

They swing back together as though to force their mistiness to crush the realness that is HEVIHAND. *And* HEVIHAND, *missing his cue, turns to* BIG-FELLOW *and somehow melts in with them, stamping his foot thuddingly, though he does not move.*

HEVIHAND. Great themes shall be the stuff that Life is made of!

PINOCCHIO. His voice is so sad . . . .

HEVIHAND. Themes that the wind sings in a storm.

PINOCCHIO. He could make my song! . . . .

HEVIHAND. Themes that the clouds form in the wind. Themes that gold makes in the earth. Stone cut with a clean bold stroke shall build upon the base laid down by Power and by Strength.

PINOCCHIO. What's "Power"? . . . .

HEVIHAND. Only Strength shall wield the Power — (PINOCCHIO — *sadly, on not receiving an answer* — "He doesn't know".) — and only Power shall

yield to Strength.

PINOCCHIO. I won't ask about Strength. (*But* HEVIHAND *has turned Poet instead of Dictator.* PINOCCHIO *feels noble in his self-restraint, and as he nods his head he starts to sing his song where he left off*)

SOULSPINNER. (*Timidly*) Where shall we . . . . (*He is afraid to finish. But another . . . .*

SOULSPINNER. . . . *picks it up . . .*) use the . . . . (*gasps, and is unable to brave* HEVIHAND. *Yet a third . . . .*

SOULSPINNER. . . . *completes it . . .*) Fluff of Life? (*The* SOULSPINNERS *all murmur, but* HEVIHAND'S *voice is easily heard above them all*)

HEVIHAND. Bring me the Fluff of Life. (*Accenting "bring", he sounds persuasive instead of imperative*)

PINOCCHIO. (*The tone of voice has pleased him*) Nice, kind friend!

The SOULSPINNERS *push to the gate. The great spars of twisted steel do not swing wide, as be-*

fore. The right side opens a crack, as the first of the SOULSPINNERS *form a wedge and are followed by their mates. After they have gone,* HEVIHAND *raises his hand and strikes with it the side of the bell. Standing in the traditional "inspiration pose" — head back, shoulders back, feet together, arms down and back — he chants. His arms slowly swing forward and up, while his body even more slowly returns to the normal.* PINOCCHIO *beats time to the bell and the song.*

HEVIHAND. And the Fluff shall reside within walls of stone, to be immutable and stern.

As he speaks, the bell softly reverberates through the grotto. At his last words, the SOULSPINNERS *return. Their arms are stretched above their heads, and on their pointing finger-tips lightly balances a cloud of pearl-like white; a mass of milk-weed seed; a hovering, clinging veil of snow and down. It falls before* HEVIHAND, *under the bell — seeming to settle.*
HEVIHAND. (PINOCCHIO *stops singing and is all attention*) Now watch new Life as it is made! (*He walks to the rear of the pile of stone that has formed his seat, and shoves a massive oval rock just off center to the edge of the Fluff. As he crashes his hand down upon it, a huge cleft appears. He laughs the*

laugh of Power and Strength)

HEVIHAND. (*Facing the* SOULSPINNERS *suddenly*) Now see! (*A wail from the* SOULSPINNERS *as he seizes one of them from the mass pressed against the wall and binds about his throat a bit of the Stuff of Life. To* PETER'S *despair, he has taken up the little creature tenderly, making the wail a farce*)

HEVIHAND. (*Compensatingly — as he peers at the* SOULSPINNERS —) You shall see that the Soulspinners still bear down the gossamer Stuff of Life. (*He presses the* SOULSPINNER *into the cleft, and, as the mass of suffering beings moan, he seals the rock with the same motion that opened it wide.* PINOCCHIO *goes through the motions of putting the* SOULSPINNER *in the cleft, exclaiming*—"There!" — *The* SOULSPINNERS *crowd about* HEVIHAND. *They are ready to plead; he is not ready to listen*) When you made your gossamer, where did it go? (*With a common impulse, all but* HEVIHAND *turn their faces to the void that lies past the gate*)

HEVIHAND. (*Pointing to the void beyond the gate and beyond the ledge*) To the Earth! And to the Earth shall go my Strength of stone and the suppleness of Fluff restrained. (*The* SOULSPINNERS *part*

to make a path in the direction their eyes have followed, and HEVIHAND *puts his hand to the stone,* PINOCCHIO *following his motion*)

PINOCCHIO. *There!* (*The rock rushes on; it rushes to the gate — crashed open the wrong way by its weight*) But we didn't like to do that! (*The rock rushes downward through space with a whistle of speed. The* SOULSPINNERS *crush against the gate, their heads thrust a trifle forward and their crazed eyes on this giant who meant Woe*) Well, maybe a little boy will catch it.

HEVIHAND. Aha! Power will crush Beauty, and Strength will tear the Soul. (*He clenches his fists and takes one long step toward the* SOULSPINNERS, *with arms outstretched before him*)

But the last speech has somehow come out rather sadly, accompanied by a general slump on HEVIHAND'S *part, and* PETER *can stand no more. As* PETER *appears,* PINOCCHIO *in great surprise*: "The man didn't like that!"

PETER. (PINOCCHIO *watches, horrified, as he sees what* PETER *is going to do*) Failure! The whole thing's a failure! I can't make Big-Fellow behave! (*He reaches half his body over into the stage-*

box, wielding his axe once more as he cries —) I'd rather destroy him, and I can't *stand* him this way! —

We see BIG-FELLOW'S *burnished-gold back against the spider-web grey of the* SOULSPINNERS, *his great head dark against the blue of the void, as* HELEN *clutches at* PETER'S *arm. Still the axe descends, the blow severing* BIG-FELLOW'S *head from his body, and sending it into the outstretched arms of* PINOCCHIO — *who wails*: "*Poor* Independence!" *As*

The Curtain Falls.

In consideration of the fact that all of the plays selected by the judges for presentation in this volume were produced in association with the cooperative criticism and study of a particular group, it seems fitting that the names of the members of the course in play-writing, Rhetoric 189, for 1928-29 appear here:

Dorothy Lyon Ackerman
Helen Elise Adler
R. Leslie Askren
Thomas L. Dume
James Frances Green
Melba Balmont Grimes
Arthur M. Hinkley
Morton B. Icove
Leo Kirschbaum
William Morgan Lewis, Jr.
Jerome F. McCarthy
Robert E. Miller
Willis M. Oosterhof
J. M. Girard Rooks
Henry E. Shaw
Harold M. Silverman
Nelson J. Smith
William Ruggles Thurnau
Helen A. Watier